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UNITED STATES POLICY AND DIPLOMACY REGARDING VIETNAM,  
JULY 1954-SEPTEMBER 1956

Research Project No. 756  
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FOREWORD

This history of American policy and diplomacy regarding Vietnam, July 1954-September 1956, was prepared at the request of U and P. It is one of a group of completed or projected historical studies on our policies concerning Indochina and Vietnam which collectively span the entire period since the outbreak of World War II.

Touched on only peripherally in the underlying account is the broad subject of economic and financial aid extended by the United States to South Vietnam, to the refugees from North Vietnam, and to the French military establishment in Indochina. Likewise treated only in highlights is the controversy over proposed nationwide elections to effect reunification of Vietnam, for that subject is covered in detail in a special paper issued under the title, "The Question of Nationwide Elections in Vietnam, 1954-1960" (Historical Office Research Project No. 833).

The research and writing for the present paper were done by Benjamin Bock and Cora H. Feld, with the assistance of Helene L. De Long, under the immediate direction of Peter V. Curl, Chief of the Area Studies Branch, Historical Studies Division.



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UNITED STATES POLICY AND DIPLOMACY REGARDING VIETNAM,  
JULY 1954-SEPTEMBER 1956

SUMMARY

After the signing of the Vietnamese cease-fire on July 20, 1954 and the adoption of the Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference on the next day--instruments which in effect split Vietnam along the 17th parallel--the United States gave energetic support to South Vietnamese efforts to win security and stability and, as a corollary, gain full sovereignty. There were three main aspects to this effort by the United States. First, with regard to Southeast Asia as a whole (explicitly including South Vietnam), the United States sparked the creation of an international security organization. Secondly, it provided political backing and increased economic and military aid to the Saigon Government. Thirdly, it backed South Vietnamese moves which gradually rid Vietnam of the French presence, both political and military. French withdrawal, in turn, required the working out of a modus vivendi to assure preservation of the Geneva Accords for which, with respect to South Vietnam, the French had assumed responsibility. These objectives were more or less satisfactorily met by the fall of 1956.

The concept of a collective defense organization to deter any further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia had been broached by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in late March 1954, but, because of British and French reluctance to move at that time, it was only after the conclusion of the Geneva Conference in July 1954 that the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty could be negotiated; it was signed at Manila on September 8, 1954. Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia could not adhere to the Treaty, because the Geneva Accords barred them from entering into any alliances, but a protocol extended its protection to them even without their participation.

As for American policy regarding the situation in South Vietnam, the United States pinned its hopes (with some initial reluctance and several subsequent second thoughts) on Ngo Dinh Diem, installed as Prime Minister on July 7, 1954, just two weeks before the conclusion of the Geneva Conference. Diem's intense nationalism (his principal recommendation for office) made him, preforce, anti-French. Clinging to substantial lingering stakes in Vietnam, the French became correspondingly anti-Diem. Thus, Diem's first year in office became a question of survival as,

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generally with American backing, he successfully resisted (a) the threat of a French-sponsored coup, (b) outright rebellion by the Buddhist sects (a development which the French interpreted as demonstrating Diem's weakness and thus as grounds for replacing him), (c) French demands for broadening the base of the Diem Government with ingredients which from Diem's and the American point of view, would have served only to weaken the authority of the central government, and (d) French schemes to bring Chief of State Bao Dai back from France to Saigon to take a direct part in the government of South Vietnam.

Throughout the first year of the Diem regime, the United States and France periodically tried to reconcile their respective policies in Vietnam. In talks in Washington in September 1954, continued in Paris in October, Secretary Dulles prevailed upon the French Government to give Diem a "fair and reasonable chance" of success. This agreement was almost immediately threatened, however, when, without prior consultation with France and pursuant to an earlier National Security Council decision to negotiate directly with the Government of South Vietnam rather than through the French as theretofore, President Eisenhower sent his famous October 23, 1954, letter to Premier Diem proposing a program of direct American aid to Vietnam. To work out the details of such a program, the President despatched General J. Lawton Collins to Saigon as Special United States Representative.

Displeased as the French were about the Eisenhower letter and suspicious as they were about the Collins mission, both Washington and Paris mustered a semblance of restored harmony by delegating to their envoys in Saigon greater responsibility for fashioning joint Franco-American policy in Vietnam. This move proved initially to be a success, for, by early December 1954, Collins and General Paul Ely, French Commissioner-General in the Associated States and Commander of the French Union Forces, had reached agreement on the recovery of American military equipment shipped to the French in Vietnam prior to the cease-fire and, of critical significance, on the organization and American role in the training of the Vietnamese armed forces.

The shaky French government of Premier Pierre Mendes-France stopped just short of repudiating what General Ely had agreed to in Saigon with respect to putting the United States in charge of training the Vietnamese armed forces.

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Fearful of criticism from the Right that the Collins-Ely understanding was a "sellout", and of criticism from the Left that the new arrangement violated the Geneva Accords, the French Government stalled for two months, advancing what Secretary Dulles dubbed "sterile" arguments. The French finally agreed, however, in early February 1955, to transmittal of rephrased training plans to the Saigon Government -- with the original Collins-Ely understanding as the chief operating paper. Thereupon, Premier Diem announced, on February 12, 1955, that, effective that day, the Chief of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Lieutenant General Samuel Williams, had assumed principal responsibility for the training of the Vietnamese armed forces, under the overall authority of the Commander of the French Union Forces.

In side talks on Indochina at the NATO Ministerial Meeting in Paris in December 1954, Secretary Dulles had agreed to Mendes-France's proposal that Collins and Ely assess the strengths and weaknesses of Diem and (as understood by the French), should the balance prove unfavorable, suggest alternatives in a joint report to be submitted by the end of January 1955. Attempts at a joint report foundered, however, on the fact that the Diem Government had not had sufficient time in which to demonstrate its worth (in particular, in carrying out the seven-point reform program which Collins and Ely had suggested in November 1954) and on the clear desire of Paris to replace Diem with Bao Dai -- a proposal which Washington insisted had to be "slapped down". As a result, only Collins drew up a report at the end of February, concurred in privately but unofficially by Ely, recommending retention of Diem on the principal ground that there were no satisfactory alternatives.

A mid-February letter from Eisenhower to Bao Dai, praising Diem's efforts at reform to date, and Secretary Dulles' visit to Saigon on March 1, 1955, appeared to confirm the American commitment to the Diem Government. Confidence was temporarily shaken in mid-March by the revolt of the armed forces of the Buddhist religious sects (banded together as the "United Front of Nationalist Forces"), and even General Collins became briefly of the opinion that Diem should be replaced, possibly by Bao Dai. The regular army remained loyal to the government, however, and, with its help, Diem not only put down the rebellion but also wrested control of the national police from the Binh Xuyen sect, the most powerful of the Buddhist groups in the area of Saigon. By this victory, accomplished on his own, Diem strengthened immeasurably his position in South Vietnam.

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The revolt and suppression of the Buddhist sects proved to be a development which widened the breach between the United States and France with respect to Vietnam. Albeit with privately expressed doubts, the United States supported Diem throughout the crisis; the French did not. Seizing upon the revolt as concrete evidence of Diem's incapacity to govern, Paris pressed once again for the return of Bao Dai. To this suggestion the United States agreed, on condition that Bao Dai's role would be limited to persuading the Binh Xuyen to relinquish their hold of the police establishment. The French wanted much broader responsibilities to be assigned to the Vietnamese Chief of State. However, Diem's success in coping with the Binh Xuyen removed Bao Dai from any further American consideration of his return to Vietnam in even a limited capacity.

Further proof of a Franco-American split on Vietnam was produced at the May 7-11, 1955, NATO Ministerial Meeting in Paris, where, in side talks which intensively reviewed the situation in Vietnam, the United States turned down the French proposal that it share with France America's emerging function as chief foreign adviser to the Diem government. A tenuous compromise was reached on the French desire for a precipitate military withdrawal from Vietnam whereby, in return for the United States' agreeing to accept the temporary retention of Bao Dai as Chief of State and to attempt to persuade the Diem Government to moderate its anti-French posture, the French would gradually reduce the French Expeditionary Corps in proportion to an increase in effective South Vietnamese defense forces and, although reluctant to do so, would pledge to support Diem. The Paris talks broke up with the despatch of separate instructions to American Ambassador Reinhardt and General Ely in Saigon, the chief difference between the messages being that the United States advocated disbanding the Binh Xuyen and amalgamating the other Buddhist sects into "the normal life" of the community, while the French stressed the need to bring the sects into the government and to discover some capacity in which Bao Dai might usefully serve.

An immediate and unfavorable reaction to the Paris talks was registered by General Ely, who felt unable to carry out his new instructions, said so, and resigned. The designation of Ely's successor became an issue between France and the South Vietnamese. The latter succeeded, with American moral support but with no intervention, in wresting from the French a further

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recognition of sovereignty. The civilian and military functions of the senior French representative in Vietnam (formerly combined under Ely) were split. General Pierre Jacquot succeeded Ely as Commander-in-Chief of the French Union Forces; Henri Hoppenot assumed Ely's civilian duties with the title of High Commissioner to the State of Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese Government had been displeased with the Paris talks: it had not been asked to send a representative, and, despite American assurances, it became quite uneasy about the agreement to retain Bao Dai as Chief of State. Diem therefore proposed that representatives of the United States, Britain, and France meet with him in Saigon to review the Paris agreements. The United States discouraged this proposal, for it wished to pursue an independent policy in Vietnam rather than be bound by what would appear to be a neocolonialist common approach with Britain and France. Diem therefore proceeded unilaterally to rid himself of Bao Dai by national referendum -- a step the United States felt might better have been delayed until the election of a National Assembly, for, pending the establishment of an elected body, Bao Dai represented the legitimacy of the Diem government.

With the deposition of Bao Dai as Chief of State and the approval of Diem as President of the Republic of Vietnam by the obviously rigged referendum of October 23, 1955, the Saigon Government became increasingly eager to achieve its final attribute of full sovereignty by speeding the departure of the French Expeditionary Corps from Vietnam. That the French would withdraw had been agreed upon at the Paris talks, and negotiations to this end had begun in June between French and South Vietnamese representatives. These negotiations bogged down almost immediately over the Vietnamese demand that, in return for Saigon's agreeing not to disturb the cease-fire (the preservation of which was the chief function of the French military in Vietnam), the French give a formal pledge of support, not just of the South Vietnamese Government, but of Diem personally as its head. The Vietnamese broke off the negotiations in October, by which time the French had already withdrawn most of the Expeditionary Corps.

The rapidity of the French withdrawal made increasingly pressing some kind of decision on the future of the Geneva Accords. This point was stressed in the Fourth Interim Report

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of the International Control Commission, submitted to the Geneva Conference Co-Chairmen on October 1, in which the Commission observed that inheritance of France's obligations under the cease-fire by South Vietnam, which had not signed the agreement, would, in effect, invalidate its provisions. Since the cease-fire was the sole authority for the Commission's existence, the ICC raised the question of its own future. The Co-Chairmen met in mid-November to consider the Commission's report and, on December 20, sent out letters to all the Geneva Conference powers and the countries represented on the ICC. They stressed the important function of the Commission, drew attention to its predicament, and invited the suggestions of the addressees.

In light of the fact that most of the provisions of the cease-fire had, in fact, been carried out, Washington toyed briefly with the idea of letting the Geneva Accords "die a natural death". This concept was vigorously opposed by Ambassador Reinhardt in Saigon, who considered the ICC as a major deterrent to the reopening of hostilities in Vietnam. When, in their response to the Co-Chairmen's letter of December 20, the Chinese Communists proposed a reconvening of the Geneva Conference -- a step which the United States wished to avoid at all costs -- Washington realized that the existing cease-fire machinery would have to be preserved.

In order to secure the Geneva Accords, the American and British Ambassadors in Saigon launched into what turned out to be a three months' effort to pry out of a reluctant South Vietnamese Government a declaration of intent to preserve the cease-fire following French withdrawal. The early release of such a declaration became important when, on January 19, 1956, the Diem Government asked the French to remove the remainder of their forces; to this request the French agreed, and they set April 15 (later moved up to the 28th) as the date on which the French High Command would be dissolved. Pressure built up further when, in late February, the Indian Government suggested that, prior to reconvening the Geneva Conference (as urged by the Chinese Communists), the Co-Chairmen meet to discuss the future of the Geneva Accords; such a meeting would presumably be held during the Bulganin-Khrushchev visit to Britain scheduled for mid-April, and the British wished to have the Vietnamese declaration in hand before meeting with the Russians. Secretary Dulles' talk

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with Diem in Saigon on March 14 resulted in Vietnamese agreement to a declaration, and the hard drafting began. The product was completed and sent to the British Foreign Ministry on April 3. It pledged the Vietnamese Government to "uphold existing conditions of the present state of peace."

The Geneva Co-Chairmen (represented by the Marquess of Reading for the United Kingdom and Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko for the Soviet Union) met in London from April 11 to May 8, 1956, and accepted the South Vietnamese declaration of April 3 as adequate basis on which to preserve the Geneva Conference arrangements in Vietnam despite French withdrawal. They so informed the other Geneva powers and urged the International Control Commission to continue to serve. At the insistence of the Russian Co-Chairman, they drew attention to the fact that negotiations between South and North Vietnam for the holding of nationwide elections to unify the country -- as specified both in the Geneva Conference Final Declaration and in the cease-fire -- had not been conducted, and they declared that this step should be taken. As the British subsequently explained, the reference to elections was the price they had paid to prevent the Russians from acceding to the Chinese demand for reconvening the Geneva Conference.

The United States was generally pleased with the outcome of the London talks. The Co-Chairmen had emerged as "the institutionalized arbiters of the implementation of the Geneva Agreements in Vietnam", in this capacity replacing the Geneva Conference. Although the issue of elections had been raised, the Co-Chairmen had not set a date for holding them, and most of the Geneva powers were in tacit agreement that satisfactory conditions did not exist for holding elections by July 1956, as prescribed in the Geneva Conference Final Declaration.

Sanction for maintaining the status quo having been given by the Geneva Co-Chairmen, South Vietnam and France resumed negotiations in June on the differences remaining between them with respect to which cease-fire functions each would assume. The chief stumbling block was the fact that South Vietnam refused to pay the local expenses of the International Control Commission and to sit with the North Vietnamese on the Joint Armistice

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Commission, for to take on either of these responsibilities would imply Saigon's acceptance of the Geneva Accords. By September, the French had agreed to retain both duties: to finance the ICC, subject to later negotiations with the Vietnamese respecting reimbursement, and to serve on the JAC until such time as its functions might be taken over by the ICC.

The final matter to be resolved because of French withdrawal from Vietnam was the training of the Vietnamese armed forces. With the introduction of MAAG into Vietnam in 1950, the United States had become involved, in an advisory capacity, in helping the French train the Vietnamese Army. At the time of signature of the cease-fire in Vietnam in 1954, MAAG personnel stood at a figure of 342 -- one which, by the terms of the cease-fire, could not thenceforth be exceeded. The break-up of the French military establishment in Vietnam posed the problem of how to increase the American training complement without violating the Geneva Accords.

In early February 1956, Secretary Dulles came up with the ingenious proposal that there be established under MAAG a group of 350 additional personnel to constitute a "Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission" (TERM) whose ostensible purpose would be to recover and preserve American military equipment being left in Vietnam by the French but whose real purpose would be to train the Vietnamese forces. Initially, Britain and Canada expressed doubts about TERM, and the French quite bluntly opposed it -- the former on the ground that introduction of TERM would upset the delicate negotiations with the Russians on the Vietnamese succession, and the latter on the ground that TERM clearly violated specific provisions of the Geneva Accords. However, when Prime Minister Nehru posed no objection after Secretary Dulles outlined TERM to him in New Delhi in mid-March (although Ambassador Cooper expressed fear that Nehru did not understand TERM's real mission), the doubters and opponents swung into line.

In the interest of abiding by the Geneva Accords, the United States could not introduce TERM into Vietnam without the foreknowledge and consent of the International Control Commission. Notification to the ICC was to take the form of a communication from the Government of South Vietnam to be transmitted by the French High Commissioner to the ICC. At the urging of the Department of State (in turn, under pressure from the Pentagon), the American Embassy and Vietnamese Foreign Office

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undertook in late April the drafting of such a communication in order that ICC approval might be obtained in time to permit the arrival of the first contingent of TERM on May 30. Several revisions were required to satisfy Indian demands that the notification play down the military aspects of TERM's mission.

Preoccupied with determining the legality of its own functions on an ad hoc basis beyond July 1956, the International Control Commission did not officially begin to consider the application for the admission of TERM until the end of May, although notification of TERM's impending arrival and purpose had been in its hands since April 25. Believing that the ICC had had ample time to be seized of the question, the United States proceeded to fly the first contingents of TERM to Saigon on May 30 -- a date which represented a three week's postponement of the original plans of the Department of Defense. There ensued several exchanges between the ICC and the Government of South Vietnam respecting the Commission's rights of inspection of the number and movements of TERM personnel. The Indian Chairman of the Commission was anxious to have the role of the ICC broad enough with reference to TERM's operations to forestall the possibility of an adverse minority report by the Polish member at such time as the Commission ruled on TERM's legality under the Geneva Accords. The Saigon Government provided the ICC with some, but by no means all, of the information the Commission requested. By the end of August, TERM had rounded out its full complement, and South Vietnam dropped its correspondence with the ICC on the subject of TERM. Thus, technically, TERM was introduced into Vietnam without ICC approval.

Concomitantly with the introduction of TERM, the South Vietnamese Government transferred responsibility for training its armed forces from the defunct French High Command to the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense, to be directed by the Chief of MAAG with a French military representative in a subordinate role. This move virtually completed the two-year process of eliminating French influence in South Vietnam.

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Chapter I

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IMMEDIATE POST-GENEVA POLICY, JULY-SEPTEMBER 1954

With the conclusion of the Geneva Conference, the United States sought by various means to shore up South Vietnam against the Communists. This was the purpose of energetic American efforts to assure the establishment of a stable and independent non-Communist government in Saigon. It was one objective, too, of renewed and intensified efforts to promote the creation of a collective defense arrangement for Southeast Asia.

Negotiation of the Manila Pact, With Protocol

The Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, with a Protocol extending its protection to South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, was signed at Manila on September 8, 1954, only a month and a half after the Geneva Conference. Months earlier, on March 29, 1954, Secretary of State Dulles had publicly expressed the view that "united action" was needed in Southeast Asia to meet the Communist threat,<sup>1</sup> but the British and French had declined to consider participating in a collective arrangement of this kind before the conclusion of the Geneva Conference. In a joint communiqué of June 28, however, President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill had affirmed that they would press forward with plans for collective defense in Southeast Asia irrespective of whether the negotiations at Geneva were successful,<sup>2</sup> and an Anglo-American working group had then been set up to study, inter alia, the question of the defense of Southeast Asia. Also, the ANZUS Powers--Australia, New Zealand, and the United States--meeting in Washington on June 30, 1954, had issued a communiqué emphasizing that Southeast Asia was an area in which all three countries were vitally concerned.<sup>3</sup> On the strictly

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<sup>1</sup>American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955: Basic Documents (Department of State publication 6446), vol. II, pp. 2373-2381.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., vol. I, pp. 1705-1706.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., vol. II, pp. 2332-2333.

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military side, discussions covering Southeast Asia had been held, June 3-11, in the so-called Five-Power Staff Agency (established by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and New Zealand in January 1953).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, supplemental talks had proceeded between the United States and other countries: in Manila, with the Philippine Government; in Geneva, with representatives from South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos; and in Washington, with the Thai Embassy.

Immediately following the Geneva Conference, Secretary Dulles chaired a high-level meeting in Washington on July 24--attended by Vice President Richard M. Nixon, Robert Cutler, Chairman of the National Security Council Planning Board, Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson, CIA Director Allen W. Dulles, and Harold E. Stassen, Director of the Foreign Operations Administration--to discuss the next steps to be taken with regard to Southeast Asia. Dulles informed the meeting that the joint U.S.-U.K. Study Group had produced a report which consisted primarily of an agreed draft security treaty. On the basis of this report, Dulles said, he believed that the United States should move ahead quickly with those countries in the area which were willing to join in a Southeast Asia Pact, the primary purpose of which would be to deter open aggression by the Chinese Communists. Another important objective would be to combat subversion and infiltration in the non-communist states of the area. This could be done principally by helping to build up local security forces, by providing economic support, and possibly by offering underground intelligence support.

The Secretary added that the two primary advantages to the United States in the proposed treaty would be that it would give the President discretionary authority which he did not then have for use in the event of overt Chinese aggression in the area, and it would insure the support of other nations in any actions the United States was forced to take. The Secretary stated that he did not see any necessity for a large NATO-type organization, but that, from the military standpoint, the United States should proceed rapidly with the United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand, to draft a treaty which could "draw a line" to include the Associated

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<sup>1</sup>United States Policy on Indochina in the Period of the Geneva Conference, Indochina Phase, May 8-July 21, 1954 (P/HO Research Project No. 478, top secret), pp. 5, 31, and 48-50.

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States of Indochina even though they could not be members. Asked for amplification concerning where the line would be drawn, the Secretary replied that what was inside the line was not so important as the notice given to the world that, if the line were crossed, the United States would retaliate.

The type of alliance contemplated, Dulles said, would probably not attract any adherents beyond the seven original members. On the other hand, a treaty which contained provisions regarding the economic welfare of the area, while it might eventually attract some of the Colombo powers and Japan, would delay the formation of a defense arrangement<sup>1</sup> if the United States waited for some of these powers to join.

Throughout the negotiations which led to the Manila Conference, the British Government tried to persuade the Colombo Powers to associate themselves with a proposed guarantee or defensive treaty. By August, the United Kingdom had received an affirmative answer from Pakistan, negative answers from India, Burma, and Indonesia, while the Government of Ceylon announced that it would not attend but was prepared to keep an open mind on the subject. Since the United States did not wish invitations extended to the prospective participants which would make it appear that the West was engineering the meeting, it was agreed that the governments willing to participate should issue declarations simultaneously, stating their intent to conclude a collective defense arrangement.

The United States wanted to announce the plans for the forthcoming conference as soon as possible and named August 7 as the preferred date. The French, on the other hand, wished to defer the announcement of the meeting until August 21. The French maintained that it was necessary to make sure that there would be no pretext for breaking the Armistice arrangements, pointing out that August 7 was the date when the final phase of the cease-fire agreements would go into effect in Cambodia and August 11 the date when the Armistice would become effective

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<sup>1</sup>Summary of Meeting on Southeast Asia, July 24, 1954, top secret (SEAP Special 1).

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in South Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> A compromise was reached, and on August 14, 1954, the simultaneous declarations were issued, each government stating that it would attend a meeting at Baguio, the Philippines, from September 6 to 8, 1954 to draw up a collective defense treaty for Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup>

After several days of preliminary meetings among the technical working groups, the Conference opened on September 6--at Manila rather than Baguio because of communications arrangements. The Foreign Ministers of all the countries except the United Kingdom and France attended. Foreign Secretary Eden sent the Marquess of Reading, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, in his place, and French Premier and Foreign Minister Mendès-France asked Guy La Chambre, Minister for Relations with the Associated States, to lead the French Delegation. The State of Vietnam had requested permission to send an observer to the Conference, but none of Governments represented, except the United States, wished to allow the Saigon Government to have any connection with the proceedings, even on an informal basis. Secretary Dulles therefore concluded that the South Vietnamese request, if formally presented to the Conference, would be rejected, causing general embarrassment to all concerned.<sup>3</sup>

At the First Plenary Session, Dulles declared that the United States felt a sense of common destiny with the countries of Southeast Asia. He stated further that the countries represented were united by a common danger stemming from international Communism and its insatiable ambition. He drew attention to the absence of Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam from the Conference but said that he hoped it would prove possible to "throw some mantle of protection" over those states.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Memorandum by Nunley (RA) of conversation among de Juniac and Pelletier of the French Embassy, Merchant (EUR), and Galloway (C), Aug. 5, 1954, secret; Summary of Meeting in the Secretary's Office, Aug. 5, 1954, secret (SEAP Special 2).

<sup>2</sup>Department of State Bulletin, Aug. 23, 1954, p. 264.

<sup>3</sup>From Manila, tel. SECTO 2, Sept. 2, 1954, secret.

<sup>4</sup>Manila Conference, Verbatim Proceedings of the First Plenary Session, Sept. 6, 1954, unclassified.

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At the Second Plenary Session--the Conference having moved into closed proceedings after the opening session--the French delegate suggested, in connection with Article III of the proposed Treaty, which dealt with economic cooperation, that Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam should be included in the Treaty, inasmuch as the French regarded the Geneva Agreements as "a still precarious pacification". Secretary Dulles wished to preserve the wording of Article III as it appeared in the draft, and, in particular, from the legal point of view, he did not want states specified in the body of the treaty other than the parties to it. Furthermore, the Conference representatives recognized that South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were definitely precluded from membership by the terms of the Geneva Agreement.<sup>1</sup>

To get around these difficulties, the French, in the Third Plenary Session, on September 7, again stated that one of the main concerns of the French Government since the signing of the Geneva Agreements was to make Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam eligible "in respect of the advantages to be derived from the present Treaty." These advantages were the economic measures provided in Article III and the guarantees of security found in Article IV. The French preferred that these provisions be taken care of by a separate Protocol which would be an integral part of the Treaty. They felt that this procedure would have the further advantage of preserving Article III intact, "as we all wish," and of preserving at the same time the right of non-members other than the Indochinese States to accede to the Treaty in accordance with the provisions of Article VII.<sup>2</sup>

The conferees agreed to the French proposal. They drafted a brief Protocol which designated "for the purposes of Article IV of the Treaty the States of Cambodia and Laos and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam" and stated "that the above mentioned states and territory shall be eligible in respect of the economic measures contemplated by Article III."

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<sup>1</sup>Manila Conference, Second Plenary Session, Sept. 6, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>Manila Conference, Verbatim Proceedings of the Third Plenary Session, Sept. 7, 1954, top secret.

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The Treaty and Protocol were signed on September 8. With the subsequent depositing of instruments of ratification with the Government of the Philippines, the Treaty and Protocol entered into force on February 19, 1955.<sup>1</sup>

Developments Leading to the Franco-American  
Minute of Understanding on Support of  
Diem and Direct U.S. Aid to Vietnam

Concurrently with providing protection for the State of Vietnam under the provisions of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States sought to strengthen the government in Saigon in order to create stability in a land which had known little peace since 1941 and which was soon to achieve full independence from the French. The government in power at the time of the conclusion of the Geneva Conference was that of Premier Ngo Dinh Diem, installed only two weeks earlier.

Initial Assessments of Diem and His Prospects. In the course of the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference, it had become increasingly apparent that Chief of State Bao Dai intended to appoint Diem to replace Prince Buu Loc as Premier of the Vietnamese Government. Ngo Dinh Luyen, Diem's brother, in the capacity of personal representative of Bao Dai, presented word of this possibility to the head of the American Delegation at Geneva, Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, on whose recommendation representatives of the Paris Embassy held two interviews with Diem (then in Paris).<sup>2</sup>

The Embassy reported that Diem appeared "too unworldly and unsophisticated to be able to cope with the grave problems and unscrupulous people he will find in Saigon." On balance, however,

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<sup>1</sup>American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955: Basic Documents, vol. I, pp. 912-916.

<sup>2</sup>Memorandum by Bonsal (PSA) of conversation between Smith (U) and Ngo Dinh Luyen, Geneva, May 18, 1954, top secret; memorandum by Bonsal (PSA) of conversation with Ngo Dinh Luyen, Geneva, May 20, 1954, top secret; from Geneva, SECTO 261 (repeated to Paris and Saigon), May 20, 1954, top secret.

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the Embassy favored Diem's appointment "but only in the realization that we are prepared to accept the seemingly ridiculous prospect that this Yogi-like mystic could assume the charge he is apparently about to undertake only because the standard set by his predecessors is so low." The Embassy also conceded that Diem's elevation was a "step in right direction and diametric change from prototype of suave Europeanized money-seeking dilettante represented by [former Premiers] Buu Loc, Tran Van Huu, and General Xuan, all of whom have failed so miserably."<sup>1</sup>

With regard to Diem's views on matters of substance, the Paris Embassy found the likely Premier-designate receptive to the idea of early signature of the two basic treaties, already initialed in draft, by which the State of Vietnam would receive independence from France and become a member of the French Union. Diem also approved the proposal that the United States take over from the French much of the training of the South Vietnamese armed forces. On the question of establishing an elected National Assembly, the Embassy reported Diem as having "strong reservations", believing that elections would be risky "for the foreseeable future" and that an Assembly created "by 'designation'" would have to have only very limited authority. Diem viewed with favor, however, the Embassy's suggestion that the Assembly might be a constitutional Assembly empowered to act only in an advisory capacity.<sup>2</sup>

From Saigon, Robert McClintock, the American Chargé, reported elation in Hué at the prospect of Diem's return to Vietnam as Premier--Diem's early career had been as administrator under the Emperor Bao Dai in the ancient capital of Annam. McClintock cautioned, however, that "this enthusiasm in Hué should not ... be interpreted as representative of national spirit, since Diem is identified with Central Vietnam and with Catholic faction." Describing Diem as a "not dynamic leader", McClintock hazarded the guess that "his acknowledged integrity

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 4251, May 24, 1954, secret; from Paris, tel. 4542, May 26, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 4538, May 26, 1954, secret.

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might prove real asset"; at the same time, McClintock admitted that Diem's "integrity might also make it most difficult for many officials at all levels in government cooperate under any administration headed by him."<sup>1</sup>

The French were somewhat cynical about Bao Dai's motives in selecting Diem as Buu Loc's successor. As Robert Tezenas du Montcel, French Minister for the Associated States, put it to a member of the American Delegation at the Geneva Conference, whenever, in the past, Bao Dai had spoken of the possibility of giving Diem the post of Premier, it had been with the idea of "breaking his back". McClintock, too, was wary and offered his view that "Bao Dai and company may wish to appoint honest mystic like Ngo Dinh Diem to head what is left of government in Vietnam in order to be scapegoat in event French should agree to cease-fire and armistice with Viet Minh."<sup>2</sup>

Whatever Bao Dai's motives, Ngo Dinh Diem was formally named Premier on June 16, and his government was installed on July 7. As events developed, it was with Diem, first as Premier of the State of Vietnam and then as President of the Republic of Vietnam, that the United States had to deal for the ensuing nine years.

Thwarting of Early Efforts To Oust Diem. Late in July, the French Government made known its dissatisfaction with Diem. In Paris, on July 27, Guy La Chambre, the new Minister for the Associated States in the Mendès-France cabinet, told Ambassador C. Douglas Dillon that Diem was unsuitable as Premier because the bulk of his support came from the Catholic provinces in Annam, thus alienating the sects in the southern provinces (a situation which, perhaps unbeknownst to La Chambre, Ambassador Heath in Saigon was attempting to remedy by urging various political groups and the sects in the south to rally around Diem).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2532, May 25, 1954, secret, and tel. 2564, May 27, 1954, confidential.

<sup>2</sup>Memorandum by Bonsal (PSA) of conversation with Tezenas du Montcel, Geneva, May 22, 1954, top secret; from Saigon, tel. 2564, May 27, 1954, confidential.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 327, July 26, 1954, secret; tel. 348, July 28, 1954, confidential.

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La Chambre added, however, that, because of Diem's "high moral standing", he should probably be included in any successor government.<sup>1</sup> Washington immediately asked for clarification of French intentions respecting Diem.<sup>2</sup> La Chambre replied, on the 30th, that Paris was undecided about continuing support of Diem and was sending Claude Cheysson, Mendès-France's chef de cabinet and former deputy political adviser to the French Commissioner-General in Vietnam, out to Saigon on a fact-finding mission.<sup>3</sup>

Cheysson returned to Paris with an extremely gloomy picture of the inactivity of the Government of South Vietnam. Representatives of the American Embassy in Paris talked with both La Chambre and Cheysson on August 11 and reported that the latter termed the Diem Government the most hopelessly ineffective of all Vietnamese Governments to date. La Chambre quoted from the most recent report by the French Commissioner-General in Vietnam, General Paul Ely, to the effect that the incapacity of the Government was exceeded only by its self-conceit. The Diem Government had reached few decisions and had taken little action on the most pressing problems--in particular, with respect to evacuation of non-communist Vietnamese from North Vietnam. The French in Vietnam had had to take a direct hand in coping with this particular problem. La Chambre admitted that this was bad politically but said that the French could not do otherwise, given the do-nothingness of the Vietnamese Government.<sup>4</sup>

Matters became further complicated when, also on August 11 and presumably on the basis of similarly disturbing reports from Saigon, Bao Dai announced his intention to return to Vietnam "in the near future". This announcement caught all involved completely off base. Putting as happy a construction as he could on this latest development, La Chambre told American Embassy officials that, in view of the "uselessness" of the Diem Government, Bao Dai's return to Vietnam would not be

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 366, July 27, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 366, July 28, 1954, secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Paris, tel. 438, July 30, 1954, secret.

<sup>4</sup>From Paris, tel. 598, Aug. 12, 1954, secret.

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likely to worsen the situation; if Bao Dai proposed to take an active part in administrative affairs, his return might even prove useful. Taking a contrary view, Cheysson expressed his fear that, because of the widespread opposition to Bao Dai throughout Vietnam, the return of the Chief of State might drive many Vietnamese into the arms of the Viet Minh. The Embassy concluded that La Chambre proposed to do nothing to prevent Bao Dai's move and that Cheysson wished there were some means of preventing it.<sup>1</sup> Washington's reaction was that Bao Dai was "of course an obstacle on road to progress whether in France or Viet Nam" but that "he can do more harm at present in Viet Nam than he can [in] France."<sup>2</sup>

In a move to reverse the deteriorating situation in Vietnam, Secretary Dulles proposed, in a personal communication to Premier Mendès-France on August 18, that President Eisenhower address a message to "the President of the Council of Ministers of Viet-Nam" in which he would "express on behalf of the American people his and their appreciation of the efforts of the Vietnamese Government and people in the struggle for freedom and the readiness of the American people to continue to aid in this struggle."<sup>3</sup> The French reply came in the form of an aide-mémoire of August 26 in which it was pointed out that it "would be regrettable if the message which President Eisenhower proposes to address to the Prime Minister of Vietnam was drafted in such a way that it appeared destined less to the Chief of the Vietnamese Government than to Diem personally." The French also observed that, much as they might wish that a message from the American President would "confirm support of the free world to the Vietnamese National Government, the more France would consider it dangerous that the message would be designed to consolidate the position of a man whose conduct has been demonstrated to be largely ineffectual and whose public support diminishes every day."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 603, Aug. 18, 1954, secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Paris, tel. 610, Aug. 18, 1954, secret.

<sup>4</sup>To Paris, tel. 737, Aug. 28, 1954, secret.

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Toward the end of August, Ambassador Heath reported from Saigon that no less than two plots were afoot for the replacement of Diem. One was sponsored by the "confessional groups"--the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen Buddhist sects--aided and abetted by General Nguyen Van Hinh, Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Army; these plotters were not in agreement, however, on a successor for Diem. The other plot was purely French, with the design of replacing Diem with former Premiers Tran Van Huu as the new Premier and Nguyen Van Tam as Minister of the Interior (and in charge of the Sureté). The second plot had come so close to fruition by August 26, according to Heath's account, that "operations for its execution would probably have started if I had not stated very firmly to General Ely and his Deputy Bordaz yesterday evening that Diem must be given another chance to come to terms with sects and set up capable government"--a course which Heath had been urging on Diem.<sup>1</sup>

Upon receipt of this information, the Department of State instructed Ambassador Dillon in Paris to convey orally to Premier Mendés-France or La Chambre the following:

"Department of State deeply disturbed at reports that French authorities in Indochina apparently actively encouraging change of government there. Such activities contradict repeated assertions by Mendés-France and La Chambre regarding independence of Vietnam. If carried out such projects will destroy confidence Vietnamese in their true independence. Department trusts reports do not reflect French Government's intentions."

The Department also instructed Heath in Saigon to warn General Ely "that while U.S. Government respects right of Vietnamese to select their own leaders, choice of a person such as Huu identified with idea of coalition government with Vietminh would make it impossible for us to request U.S. Congress for assistance to free Vietnamese Government which we desire to render." He was also to warn the sects "that coup d'état against Diem would produce most unfortunate effect in U.S. including doubts as to stability and prospects of free Vietnam."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 759, Aug. 27, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 733, (tel. 811 to Saigon), Aug. 28, 1954, secret.

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Accordingly, representatives of the Embassy saw La Chambre on the morning of the 30th and afterwards reported that he felt a change in the Saigon Government "in near future indispensable". The French were described, however, as "determined not pull strings or try force any Veitnamese Government out of office or into being." Nonetheless, the French felt that Tam ought to be Minister of Interior in any Vietnamese Government in order to counter Viet Minh pressures. La Chambre also informed the Embassy that Bao Dai had decided not to return to Saigon at that time.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the first half of September, the French continued to press Diem to bring Tam into his cabinet despite the fact that Diem had made it quite clear he could not stand Tam and would rather resign than accept him.<sup>2</sup> The Department therefore instructed Embassy Paris, on September 17, to deliver orally to Mendés-France or La Chambre its strongest message to date on the matter of French meddling in Saigon. "To cause the Deim Government to fall by the forced inclusion of a Minister unacceptable to Diem," the message stated, "would appear to be highly inconsistent with French assurances to the United States of the independence of Viet-Nam and would also deprive any successor government of the nationalist support indispensable to a viable government in Viet-Nam by the demonstration of foreign ability to appoint and remove its government at will." The message concluded with the warning that "there should be no misunderstanding regarding the fact that American aid could not be furnished to a government in Viet-Nam which failed to include substantial nationalist support."<sup>3</sup>

When read the contents of the Department's message on the following day, Mendés-France pleaded ignorance of machinations in Saigon to force Tam into the Diem Government. He commented, however, that the South Vietnamese Government was "clearly disintegrating". He observed, further, that it was important that the United States and France concert their policies with respect to Indochina rather than work at cross purposes and that

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 873, Aug. 30, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 842, Aug. 31, 1954, secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Paris, tel. 997, Sept. 17, 1954, secret.

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it was for this reason he was sending Ely and La Chambre to Washington for high-level talks--a proposal which Acting Secretary Smith had approved on September 14.<sup>1</sup> Mendes-France agreed to instruct the French in Saigon to "go easy" until these talks had been held.<sup>2</sup>

From the American viewpoint, it was highly desirable that the Diem Government receive the acknowledged support of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects (both of which had a genuine religious base with considerable religious and political following in South Vietnam) prior to the opening of the Washington talks, scheduled for September 27. To this end, the American Embassy in Saigon had for some time been conducting negotiations, which, toward the end of September, began to show signs of bearing fruit. Disruption threatened, however, when, on September 21, "General" Le Van Vien, head of the Binh-Xuyen (a group which controlled much of the police and a substantial number of South Vietnam's gambling establishments), announced to the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao that he had just returned from Paris with a mandate from Bao Dai to form a new government. He added that La Chambre had told him he "would find that there was something changed" in the American point of view about supporting Diem.

On the afternoon of the 21st, the Counselor of Embassy, Randolph A. Kidder, allayed the fears of the representatives of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. He assured them that the United States position had not changed, that the United States would continue to support the legal Government of South Vietnam, and that it would view with extreme disfavor any use of force to change the Government. He added that the United States was not wedded to any particular Government, but that, even in case of legal and peaceful change, the United States would have to take a look at the new Government, its representative nature, and its anti-Communist orientation, and review the American position on military and economic aid in the light of these findings. Kidder said that he had no knowledge of any "mandate" granted to Le Van Vien.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 990, Sept. 17, 1954, confidential.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 1171, Sept. 18, 1954, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1154, Sept. 21, 1954, top secret.

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On the basis of Kidder's reassurances, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects announced their full accord on the desirability of supporting Diem. On September 24, Diem, in turn, announced the formation of a new cabinet which contained several members from the two sects.<sup>1</sup> With these moves, the prospects of obtaining French agreement to support Diem in the forthcoming Washington talks seemed distinctly brighter.

The Question of American Direct Aid to Vietnam, Training of Vietnamese Forces, and Support of the French Expeditionary Corps. Although there was no formal agenda for the Washington talks, several practical matters besides support of Diem were bound to come up for discussion and solution. The United States was anxious to obtain French acceptance of the principle of direct American aid to South Vietnam and of American sharing with the French the task of training the South Vietnamese armed forces. The French desired assurances of continued American support for the French Expeditionary Corps in South Vietnam during the period of its phased withdrawal from the area.

The concept of direct aid became national policy with the approval, on August 12, of a new National Security Council paper on the Far East. With reference to the Associated States of Indochina, the paper stated that, "working through the French only insofar as necessary," the United States should "assist Cambodia, Laos and free Vietnam to maintain (1) military forces necessary for internal security and (2) economic conditions conducive to the maintenance and strength of non-Communist regimes and comparing favorably with those in adjacent areas." This statement flowed logically from the precepts that the United States should "urge the French to promptly recognize and deal with Cambodia, Laos, and free Vietnam as independent sovereign nations" and should "strengthen U.S. representation and deal directly, wherever advantageous to the U.S., with the governments of Cambodia, Laos and free Vietnam."<sup>2</sup> "The furnishing, as far as possible, of direct assistance to the Associated States of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam as well as to the forces

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tels. 1185 and 1188, Sept. 23, 1954, and 1213, Sept. 24, 1954, all top secret.

<sup>2</sup>National Security Council 5429/1, Aug. 12, 1954, top secret.

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of other free nations in the area including those of France located in such Associated States" became law by Section 121 of the Mutual Security Act of 1954, approved on August 26.<sup>1</sup>

That the South Vietnamese would be agreeable to receiving aid directly from the United States and American trainers for their armed forces had been evident since May--indeed, Bao Dai had suggested these measures.<sup>2</sup> The French, on the other hand, were reluctant to bring the United States into Vietnam with such an independent role, and raised the Geneva Accords as a legal obstacle to such a course. The French presented this argument in their response to Secretary Dulles' formal proposal in his letter of August 18 to Premier Mendès-France, mentioned earlier.

In that letter Dulles had written: "In addition to military material assistance and economic aid, we are prepared to give direct assistance to the Associated States, including budgetary support, in addition to the support furnished by the French Union." He had added: "We believe presently some and eventually all of this aid should be given directly rather than through the French Government, as has been done previously." "This approach", Dulles explained, "seems to us in keeping with the independent status of these states and necessary to help them to develop their self-confidence and self-reliance."

Dulles had then turned to the subject of military training, saying, "We are also prepared to consider the requests of the Associated States such as have been made by Viet-Nam and Cambodia to undertake direct military training of their armed forces [and] ... are prepared to consider the establishment of training missions in their territories." He pointed out "that General Ely and General [John W.] O'Daniel have already discussed at least the possibility of a training function for our present Military Aid Advisory Group."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>68 Stat. 837.

<sup>2</sup>Memorandum by Bonsal (PSA) of conversation with Ngo Dinh Luyen, Geneva, May 20, 1954, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Paris, tel. 610, Aug. 18, 1954, secret.

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In their reply of August 26, the French observed that, with reference to direct American aid to the Vietnamese National Army, it "would appear dangerous with regard to the agreements of Geneva for U.S. not to supply end items through intermediary of France." They also argued for "strict coordination on spot" if the development of the Vietnamese armed forces was to conform to the Geneva Accords, and, for this purpose, they suggested that "mixed committee be constituted [in] Saigon, under General Ely, to realize this coordination." They cautioned that "any agreement for military aid that the U.S. enters into directly with Vietnam" might be viewed "as an alliance contrary to the Geneva agreements".

On the matter of American trainers for the Vietnamese armed forces, the French conceded that "before Geneva" they had seen "advantages" to this kind of American aid. The terms of the Vietnamese cease-fire had, however, complicated this possibility. In the first place, some of the Geneva Conference powers would interpret the introduction of an American training mission as establishment of a foreign military base in violation of the cease-fire. Furthermore, the French Foreign Ministry argued, "if one can admit ... that provisions of agreement on cessation of hostilities in Vietnam strictly interpreted authorizes replacement, man for man, of MAAG personnel ..., it would appear to be out of question ... to replace those members of this body who perform administrative functions with training personnel."<sup>1</sup>

The French were quick to note that Secretary Dulles had made no mention in his August 18 message of continuing American budgetary support of the French Expeditionary Corps in Vietnam. This omission had been deliberate, for the matter was considered in Washington as an "open question". Ambassador Dillon explained this to La Chambre in Paris and added that, for the question to be resolved, it would be necessary for the United States to be informed of French thinking on the size of the expeditionary force to be left in Indochina "and related data". La Chambre agreed to provide full information as soon as possible and indicated that General Ely's initial thinking was that the French Expeditionary Corps would be reduced from its existing

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 737, Aug. 28, 1954, secret.

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strength of 180,000 to 150,000 by the end of 1954 and to 100,000 by the end of 1955, with a compensating increase in the size of the Vietnamese National Army from its current total of 155,000.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the wide disparity of points of view revealed in Secretary Dulles' letter of August 18 and the French aide-mémoire of the 26th, Dillon urged the Department to hold in abeyance the question of financial support for the FEC until a satisfactory agreement had been reached with the French on future United States relationships with the Associated States. He proposed this delay "in order not [to] undercut our bargaining position."<sup>1</sup> It was to resolve these differences, too, that the Washington talks were held at the end of September.

The Washington Talks and the Smith-La Chambre Minute of Understanding, Initialed September 29, 1954. It was the French who proposed, in mid-September, that high-level talks be held in Washington in an attempt to reconcile French and American policies in Indochina. Edgar Faure, the Finance Minister, was scheduled to attend the meeting of the International Monetary Fund, September 24-27, and the French suggested that La Chambre and General Ely fly over to join him for attendant Indochina talks. Washington approved.<sup>3</sup>

When Diem got wind of the scheduled talks, he asked Ambassador Heath in Saigon whether he should not appoint a special envoy to the talks and insist that any discussions relating to Vietnam be tripartite in nature. Washington instructed Heath to inform Diem that the United States had no list of specific subjects the French might wish to raise and presumed that the talks would deal primarily with United States financial support of the French Expeditionary Corps, which was

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 873, Aug. 30, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 945, Sept. 2, 1954, secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Paris, tel. 1113, Sept. 15, and to Paris, tel. 990, Sept. 17, 1954, both confidential.

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a bilateral problem. Washington added that Vietnamese officials would be kept abreast of developments.<sup>1</sup>

On the morning of September 25, La Chambre and Acting Secretary Smith held a preliminary exchange of views on the nature of the political problems in Vietnam requiring solution--Laos and Cambodia were not discussed. Smith produced a report by Senator Mansfield which stated that only the kind of government which Diem envisioned--a government "free of corruption and dedicated to achieving genuine national independence and internal amelioration"--was worthy of United States support.<sup>2</sup> The Acting Secretary emphasized that Senator Mansfield's views would have great influence in Congress, "particularly with Democrats".

La Chambre acknowledged Diem's honesty, incorruptibility, and strong nationalism but expressed concern at Diem's apparent inability to produce an efficient government capable of eliminating corruption and of meeting Communist infiltration. Conceding that, with the reorganization of his cabinet on September 24, Diem had the nominal support of two of the three sects, La Chambre observed that the continued opposition of the powerful Binh Xuyen sect and of Chief of Staff General Hinh (i.e., most of the Army) made Diem very weak to counter the Viet Minh. One also had to keep in mind the fact that Bao Dai still had the authority to "unmake" governments in Saigon whenever he did not agree with France and the United States. For the time being, the French wished to retain Bao Dai in the event it proved necessary to have the French Expeditionary Corps restore order in South Vietnam, and Bao Dai's assent would be required to give such action a "cloak of legality". At the conclusion of the meeting, Smith stressed the need for a "positive political program to save what had been salvaged at Geneva."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1088, Sept. 18, and to Saigon, tel. 1127, Sept. 20, 1954, both secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Berlin, tel. 212, Sept. 24, 1954, secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1217 (1113 to Paris, 1749 to London), Sept. 25, 1954, top secret.

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At the first formal meeting of the Washington talks, on September 27, both sides agreed that "France and U.S. support Diem in establishment and maintenance of strong anti-Communist and Nationalist Government and to that end will jointly urge all anti-Communist elements in Vietnam to cooperate fully with Diem Government to counter vigorously Viet Minh and build strong free Vietnam." No sooner had the meeting adjourned than La Chambre received and communicated to Smith a message from Paris to the effect that, in two interviews with the French, Bao Dai had expressed astonishment at the "unusual" intervention by the United States and France in Vietnamese affairs by holding the Washington talks without Vietnamese representation--an act he found "incompatible with independence". Bao Dai had obviously also been piqued by receipt of a telegram from Diem declaring that Diem could not be withdrawn as Premier without causing an immediate stoppage of American aid to Vietnam. In Bao Dai's view, the retention of Diem would increase political chaos and risk bloody incidents in Saigon which could only profit the Viet Minh. The Vietnamese Chief of State was therefore considering the formation of a new government under General Nguyen Van Xuan, a former Vice Premier and Premier.<sup>1</sup>

Acting Secretary Smith and La Chambre immediately sent a joint message to Saigon requesting the views of Ambassador Heath and Jean Daridan, Deputy French Commissioner-General, on Bao Dai's proposed course of action.<sup>2</sup> Smith followed this up with a personal message to Heath asking whether, with French and United States support, it would be possible to "make a synthetic strong man" out of Diem and to "associate with him competent people who may compensate for his deficiencies in administrative ability and governing capacity." Coming to the crux of the matter, Smith asked: "Can there be built around Diem, on basis of his honesty, integrity and sincerity, a government which with our combined support will be relatively enduring and may eventually attract the allegiance of the three sects and the Army?"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1240, Sept. 28, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1240 (1135 to Paris, 1776 to London), Sept. 28, 1954, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1254, Sept. 28, 1954, top secret.

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While awaiting word from Saigon, the negotiators in Washington turned, on September 28, to economic and military matters. Edgar Faure, the French Finance Minister, made a formal request that the United States supply financial assistance in support of the French Expeditionary Corps for calendar year 1955. Harold E. Stassen, Director of the Foreign Operations Administration, replied that the request would be considered and explained that the United States Congress would have to be consulted on this matter.<sup>1</sup> The military discussions dealt with the role of the FEC in Indochina, the development of an autonomous Vietnamese Army, and the problems relating to the evacuation of military and civilian personnel and materiel from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, in which operations United States Navy vessels were assisting the Vietnamese and French authorities.<sup>2</sup>

When La Chambre and Ely met with Smith on the 29th, the conferees had before them "a joint expression of views of Daridan and Heath" respecting Bao Dai's proposed replacement of Diem with Xuan. Daridan and Heath agreed that, "if it is French and U.S. policy to support Diem at this time, there is nothing more that can be done here [in Saigon]." They suggested that Heath proceed to Cannes, via Paris, to make representations to Bao Dai in Diem's favor. If these proved unavailing, "then appointment of Xuan might result in quick but only very temporary solution of crisis." Both Daridan and Heath were of the opinion that "Xuan would not be acceptable Prime Minister for long term solution and enduring government."<sup>3</sup>

Smith also had the benefit of views of certain other French and Vietnamese officials in Saigon (reported by Heath) who pointed out that Xuan was a French citizen and a French general officer "who has practically forgotten his native tongue." Because Xuan lacked "any real force of his own

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 1157 (1277 to Saigon, TOSEC 5 to London), Sept. 29, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>To London, tel. TOSEC 4 (1154 to Paris, 1264 to Saigon), Sept. 28, 1954, confidential.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1265, Sept. 28, 1954, top secret.

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behind him, he would be pawn of Hinh and [the] Binh Xuyen."<sup>1</sup> Heath then added some views of his own to the effect that Diem could be brought through the existing crisis "if we remain united and firm and if Diem Government accepts some necessary compromises", such as appointing Xuan as Defense Minister and Vice President. Heath concluded, however, that, "while Diem is only man now in sight with character enough to form and head an enduring government, we must be looking around urgently, as so far we have been doing without success, for a relief pitcher and get him warming up in bullpen," for "Diem's intrinsic faults may yet create a situation making his replacement necessary."<sup>2</sup>

La Chambre agreed that Heath should visit Bao Dai in Cannes on the premise that, in the "first phase", France and the United States should bolster Diem without reservations and give him a chance to succeed. At the same time, La Chambre pointed out, the seriously deteriorating situation in Vietnam could not brook long delays. Thus, should Diem fail despite "our real thorough assistance", it might prove necessary to ask Bao Dai to delegate powers to former Premier Buu Loc, Diem's immediate predecessor, to settle matters by forming a government of national union with himself or someone else as Premier and with Diem in the cabinet. La Chambre and Ely agreed that Xuan should not be made Premier; both concurred with Heath, however, that Xuan might be made Minister of Defense if such an appointment would help to reconcile Diem and General Hinh. Smith pronounced himself gratified at the French stand and agreeable to their suggestion for an alternative to Diem, should need be.<sup>3</sup>

Supported by the views of Heath and Daridan from Saigon, Smith and La Chambre then initialed a Minute of Understanding. Its political provision concerning Diem remained as agreed upon on the 27th. On the question of direct aid, the Minute specified that "the channel for French and U.S. economic aid, budgetary support, and other assistance to each of the Associated States will be direct to it." At the request of the French, the following sentence was added: "Such programs will be planned

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1266, Sept. 28, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1270, Sept. 29, 1954, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1296, Sept. 30, 1954, secret.

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and closely coordinated to assure maximum effectiveness through appropriate machinery to be established in agreement with the interested Governments." Finally, the Minute stated that French and United States support of the independence of the Associated States would "include the completion of the transfer of powers in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, to the free governments of these States on an orderly and progressive basis."<sup>1</sup>

Having transmitted the text of the Minute of Understanding to their respective representatives in Saigon, Smith and La Chambre held a brief supplementary meeting on September 30. They sent a joint message to Heath and Daridan in which they acknowledged that it would be "prudent bear in mind possibility that despite our best efforts he [--Diem--] may be unable maintain strong government due opposition factors beyond his control." They mentioned the possibility of bringing in Buu Loc but added that "we would be unwilling to in any way prejudice Diem's effort ... by allowing it be known we considering successor." Smith and La Chambre concluded that "we should base our judgment of Diem's success henceforth on basis fair and reasonable chance with wholehearted U.S.-French backing in order he be able take advantage additional support."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in a little over two months following the conclusion of the Geneva Conference, the United States achieved its immediate objectives respecting Vietnam--through the SEATO "umbrella", an outside guarantee against aggression and subversion; through the Smith-La Chambre "Minute", a paper promise from the French favoring complete independence and internal stability. In the ensuing nine months, the United States and France attempted, with diminishing success, to correlate by action their respective understandings of what Smith and La Chambre had agreed to in Washington.

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1297, Sept. 30, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1327, Oct. 1, 1954, top secret.

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## Chapter II

### THE BREAKDOWN OF FRANCO-AMERICAN COOPERATION IN VIETNAM, OCTOBER 1954-MAY 1955

The Smith-La Chambre "Minute of Understanding" represented the high point in cooperation between the United States and France regarding Vietnam; thereafter, the semblance of harmony deteriorated rapidly. Very soon, despite the "Minute of Understanding", there was renewed wrangling about the respective roles of the United States and France in Vietnam and the question of retaining Diem as Prime Minister.

#### French Consideration of "Another Structure of Government" in Saigon; NSC Decision To Bolster Diem

The decision by France and the United States to give the Diem government full support for a trial period had no immediate effect on Diem's own position in Saigon. General Hinh and the Army continued to refuse to take orders from Diem unless General Xuan were appointed Minister of Defense; Xuan refused to accept the post unless he were also made Vice Premier. The Binh Xuyen continued their active opposition to Diem.

As agreed by Smith and La Chambre in Washington, Ambassador Heath flew from Saigon to Paris and called on Bao Dai at Cannes on October 3 to enlist his support in the Vietnamese governmental crisis. As the Department of State instructed Heath, what the United States hoped for was some kind of action by Bao Dai which would "at least neutralize active opposition" of the Binh Xuyen and General Hinh. If Bao Dai declined active cooperation, it was hoped that he would grant "a reasonable period of time during which, with our support and in absence of organized or inspired opposition, Diem can make an effort, and we hope achieve, a strongly nationalist, anti-Communist government."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 1194, Oct. 1, 1954, top secret.

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Bao Dai told Heath that he had no objections to Diem's remaining in office, despite the fact that he was, in Bao Dai's opinion, neither a natural statesman nor overly intelligent. To succeed, Bao Dai added, Diem would need to change his entourage. Bao Dai felt that, in view of the political situation in Saigon, General Hinh should be retained as Chief of Staff in order to hold the Army together; he felt also, however, that Hinh should take orders from the Diem Government. Respecting General Xuan, Bao Dai expressed little confidence in either his loyalty or ability, and, in fact, Bao Dai declared that he could rely more on Diem's loyalty than on that of any other candidate for Premier. Heath concluded that, "at least in the future", Bao Dai would not try to dismiss or even undermine Diem.<sup>1</sup>

Upon his return to Saigon, Heath, in cooperation with General Ely, tried manfully in the ensuing weeks to remedy some of Diem's problems. But General Hinh remained adamant in his opposition, and there was evidence that the Binh Xuyen were about to toss in their lot with the Army and stage a coup against Diem. On October 22, Heath expressed his discouragement in a cable to the Department:

"For more than 40 days Diem and General Hinh have been deadlocked. And 40 days have been largely lost which government with necessary cooperation of army should have employed in establishing its authority over provinces, extirpating Viet Minh infiltration and terrorism, and winning rural population. Fault certain initially was Hinh's but failure to find compromise solution is in large part due to Diem's lack of personality, his inability to win over people of opposite views, his stubbornness and intransigence, his general political ineptitude, and his slowness in decision and action. We have by our advice partially remedied some of his deficiencies. We have kept him from doing certain things that would have been bad for his government, and have gotten him to take certain steps to improve his administration, but we have had

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 1413, Oct. 4, 1954, secret.

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to compete with his own willfulness and entourage of personal friends and family members whose advice has generally been bad."<sup>1</sup>

It was against the background of political stalemate in Saigon that Secretary Dulles discussed Vietnam with Premier Mendès-France in Paris on October 20 while attending the Nine-Power Meeting on European Security. The French Premier agreed with Dulles that the situation in Saigon was serious. While remaining "firm" regarding the importance of giving Diem every chance, Mendès-France nonetheless said that plans should be laid for "another structure of government" in Vietnam in the event Diem should fail. Mendès-France's phrase, which he declined to elaborate for Dulles, roused suspicions in the Department that the French were hankering to reestablish in South Vietnam a political system similar to that of the Cochinchinese Republic of 1946, which was based on police and military power and had strong colonialist overtones. Such a system, the Department felt, "would create conditions in South Viet-Nam analagous to those which ended by delivering to Viet Minh northern half of Viet-Nam, even though it might in the short run restore internal order."<sup>2</sup>

Developments in Vietnam were deemed sufficiently critical that the National Security Council became seized of the question at its October 22 meeting. The Council noted, as the Department paraphrased the Council's proceedings for Dulles in Paris, that the Diem Government was still immobilized by the opposition military clique, that the French had not been actively working to consolidate the Diem Government, and that some new and immediate United States moves were necessary in order to attempt to break the "paralyzing impasse since time is running out and Diem government will otherwise collapse." The National Security Council contemplated two "new and immediate moves": (1) delivery of a letter (which had been drafted a few weeks before) from President Eisenhower to Diem reiterating United States support of the Government of Free Vietnam and suggesting immediate discussions regarding direct United States aid,

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1536, Oct. 22, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, DULTE 5, Oct. 21, 1954, top secret; to Paris, TEDUL 11, Oct. 21, 1954, top secret.

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and (2) initiation of an immediate limited military advisory and training program by MAAG Saigon. In addition, at the President's "suggestion", Dulles was again to see Mendès-France, reveal to him the steps the United States was going to take (with the hope of French agreement), and review Washington's understanding of the Smith-La Chambre "Minute".

Accordingly, Dulles saw the French Premier on the morning of the 23rd and told him that, in implementation of the "Minute" of September 29, the United States and France could best further free world objectives in Vietnam by giving support and assistance to a government of national union under Diem. The United States believed, Dulles added, that the French could still bring much more pressure on the military cabal than had been exerted to make peace with Diem so that his government might proceed with urgent internal tasks--Dulles explained that he was not referring to the top French authorities in Saigon but to the "underlings". In moving immediately to carry out direct assistance programs and to step up MAAG training of Vietnamese military personnel, Dulles said, the United States hoped to strengthen Diem. If a government of national union were not formed, or, if formed, did not receive the full and unreserved support of the National Army and other groups and personalities throughout free Vietnam, or if Diem were removed from office or effectively prevented from developing a broad government, Dulles warned, the United States would have to reconsider its aid to Vietnam--in particular, whether the United States could continue even limited, short-term assistance to prevent a critical emergency. Dulles reminded Mendès-France that Congressional support was needed for any aid to Vietnam and cited Senator Mansfield's recent report in which the Senator had said:

"Should the Diem government be forced out of office, it is doubtful that, under the pressure of time, a more satisfactory substitute, subscribing to the same principles to which he does, will be found. ... In the event that the Diem government falls, therefore, I believe that the United States should consider an immediate suspension of all aid to Vietnam and the French Union forces there, except that of a humanitarian nature, preliminary to a complete reappraisal of our present policies in Free Vietnam."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Report on Indochina: Report of Senator Mike Mansfield on a Study Mission to Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, October 15, 1954 (Committee print, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 83d Cong., 2d Sess.), p. 14.

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Mendès-France replied that the French were prepared to carry out their part of the Washington agreement to the full until such time as the Diem government became hopeless. He believed, however, that the United States and France should have some alternative plan in mind to substitute for the Diem formula when and if it failed. The Premier said that the French were studying a plan whereby a person would be sent to Vietnam to act as the delegate of Bao Dai--"a sort of viceroy"--who would have no powers to interfere in the government but who would serve the purpose of retaining the prestige of legitimacy which came from Bao Dai and of avoiding the undesirable effect of Bao Dai himself returning to Vietnam.

Dulles responded that he had no objection to the French plan, provided the man sent to Saigon did not interfere in politics.<sup>1</sup> The Department's Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs took a somewhat different view, declaring that sending a "viceroy" to Saigon would complicate matters by "further weakening Diem's authority" unless the "viceroy" did nothing at all, in which case his being in Saigon "would be pointless."<sup>2</sup>

Implementation of the NSC Decision: (1) The  
"Crash Program" for Improving Vietnamese  
Armed Forces

Pursuant to the National Security Council decision of October 22, the Departments of State and Defense sent a joint directive to Ambassador Heath and General O'Daniel in Saigon which read, in part, as follows:

"(1) It is U.S. Government policy to support the Government of Free Vietnam under the Premiership of Ngo Dinh Diem and to assist that Government (a) to promote internal security and political stability in Free Vietnam, (b) to establish and maintain control by that Government throughout the territory of Free Vietnam, and

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, TEDUL 14, Oct. 22, 1954, top secret; from Paris, tel. 1717, Oct. 23, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>Memorandum by Robertson (FE) to the Secretary, Oct. 25, 1954, secret.

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(c) effectively to counteract Viet Minh infiltration and paramilitary activities south of the 17th parallel.

"(2) It is realized that the principal stumbling block to effecting the policies outlined above is concerned with the loyalty of the existing Vietnamese armed forces, and particularly the loyalty of the Chief of Staff of those forces, General Hinh. It is further apparent that any long range program of aid for and training of these Vietnamese armed forces can have no appreciable effect on the immediate situation. It is therefore directed that the Ambassador and the Chief of MAAG collaborate in setting in motion a crash program designed to bring about an improvement in the loyalty and effectiveness of the Free Vietnamese forces. For this purpose the assets of all U.S. Government agencies in Free Vietnam will be concentrated as necessary in the hope that within the immediate future (the next month or so) the present Diem government can be strengthened to such an extent that longer range programs can be decided upon with a reasonable expectation of success. The details of 'how' are left in the hands of the Ambassador and General O'Daniel. ...

"(3) Financial limitations are not prescribed for this crash program, as it is considered here that necessary resources are now available to Ambassador and MAAG Saigon for such actions as may be practical. Speed is essential to achieve success.

"(4) If it is considered necessary, you both are authorized at any time to inform French authorities, Vietnamese authorities, and General Hinh personally of U.S. objectives and to further state without equivocation that no long range support to the Vietnamese armed forces will be programmed or extended by the U.S. as long as there is the slightest doubt as to the loyalty of the Chief of Staff or other high officers in those forces. ..."

The directive then proceeded to make the far-reaching proposal that, should it be determined "that it is not practical to work with the existing Vietnamese armed forces organization," Heath and O'Daniel, "upon receipt of concurrence from Departments State and Defense," inform Diem "that the United States is willing to commence immediately the organization of a national police or constabulary separated from the present Vietnamese armed forces" if Diem could select someone deemed by the Ambassador and the Chief of MAAG "competent to command such an organization".

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Heath was also requested to undertake the necessary negotiations with the Saigon Government and the local French authorities to obtain agreements "(a) ensuring US MAAG Saigon will have the necessary authority, responsibility and freedom of action to carry out the above program; and (b) assuring the cooperation, coordination and assistance from Vietnamese and French authorities and personnel at all levels in Free Vietnam." Finally, Heath and O'Daniel were assured that "the Department of State will undertake to obtain appropriate understanding and means of augmenting the MAAG strength as required," but that, in the meantime, existing MAAG personnel would have to accomplish the objectives set forth in the directive.<sup>1</sup>

On October 24, General O'Daniel and a representative of Embassy Saigon called on General Hinh and, after listening patiently to his lengthy account of grievances against Diem, received his assurance that he would issue a statement in support of the Government of the State of Vietnam, without, however, mentioning the Diem government in particular. In return, Hinh hoped that Diem would issue instructions that the distribution of all tracts against the Army be stopped immediately.<sup>2</sup>

The Embassy and MAAG Saigon had completed, by October 27, an outline of steps to be taken to implement the "crash program" requested by the Departments of State and Defense. By way of a "kick-off", they recommended the issuance of two statements. One, by Diem, would outline a general program designed to strengthen the country in its common fight against communism in which all forces of the nation, including the Army, would have roles to play. The statement would assure the Army that its development would be fostered, its integrity preserved, and its legitimate military rights protected. The second statement, by Hinh, would declare the loyalty of the Army to "the present legal government".

With respect to the Government, the Embassy and MAAG proposed a housecleaning of the Presidential office and a revamping of the cabinet to bring in more capable individuals, particularly in the Ministry of Interior. A general statement on land reform

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1679, Oct. 22, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1575, Oct. 25, 1954, top secret.

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was required at an early date. Heath and O'Daniel urged that "Diem get out of Palace and among people, including inspection tours of Armed Forces," and suggested a "coordinated and effective publicity campaign on large scale through Vietnamese Information Ministry with support and advice from USIS and other appropriate U.S. agencies."

With respect to the Army, the Embassy and MAAG proposed that, with General Ely's concurrence, Diem and Hinh agree to accept American officers at headquarters "with a view to establishing and extending American influence in Army." Heath and O'Daniel contemplated "immediate introduction three MAAG officers into headquarters staff Vietnamese Armed Forces, one MAAG officer into Defense Ministry and one MAAG officer in each of three Vietnamese Regional Military Headquarters." They recommended that the Vietnamese military be better organized and instructed to carry out the pacification program, and they foresaw an early need for General Hinh to issue instructions prohibiting members of the Armed Forces from engaging in political activities. It would also be necessary to obtain from Generals Ely and Hinh agreement that French officers holding key posts in the Vietnamese Armed Services be gradually supplanted by Vietnamese officers, with the French remaining as advisers only. The Embassy and MAAG also believed it important that Ely "be kept informed of crash program activities and his advice, cooperation and support solicited and geared into program" while, in return, Ely would "be persuaded to police more effectively his subordinates."

With respect to the size of MAAG, General O'Daniel estimated the need for 215 officers, 69 enlisted men, 57 American and 172 Vietnamese civilians for training and advisory roles. In addition, 58 military and 145 civilian spaces would be needed "to fulfill MAAG administrative and end-item functions." O'Daniel assured the Department that the military spaces contemplated would be kept within the 342-man strength of MAAG as of the date of the Vietnamese cease-fire.

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1609, Oct. 27, 1954, secret; from CHMAAG Saigon, Army message MG 3381-A, Oct. 27, 1954, secret.

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Implementation of the NSC Decision: (2) The  
Eisenhower Letter to Diem and French  
Reaction Thereto

The second of the one-two punches ordered by the National Security Council was the delivery of a letter from President Eisenhower to Premier Diem which had been signed and dated by the President on October 1 and held for use at an appropriate time. The letter, which Diem agreed to have made public, was delivered on the afternoon of October 23. In it the President said, in part:

"We have been exploring ways and means to permit our aid to Viet-Nam to be more effective and to make a greater contribution to the welfare and stability of the Government of Viet-Nam. I am, accordingly, instructing the American Ambassador to Viet-Nam to examine with you in your capacity as Chief of Government, how an intelligent program of American aid given directly to your Government can serve to assist Viet-Nam in its present hour of trial, provided that your Government is prepared to give assurances as to the standards of performance it would be able to maintain in the event such aid were supplied.

"The purpose of this offer is to assist the Government of Viet-Nam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means. The Government of the United States expects that this aid will be met by performance on the part of the Government of Viet-Nam in undertaking needed reforms. ..."<sup>1</sup>

The French hit the roof. Mendès-France telephoned Ambassador Dillon on Sunday, October 24, to state that, based on reports from General Ely and La Chambre (the latter was en route from Saigon to Paris), Eisenhower's letter was a "clear-cut violation" of the agreements reached during the Washington talks. He felt that the letter went far beyond anything he had understood Secretary Dulles to imply in their conversation of

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<sup>1</sup>American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955: Basic Documents, vol. II, pp. 2401-2402.

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the day before. Mendès-France made a personal request that delivery of the Eisenhower letter be held up until its contents could be discussed with La Chambre on the following day--a request which, of course, it was too late to consider.<sup>1</sup>

Incensed as they were about the Eisenhower letter, the French took even more particular exception to the phrase in the Department's instructions to Dulles following the National Security Council meeting of the 22nd in which it was stated that "the French have not been actively working to consolidate the Diem Government". (The instructions had been shown to French officials in both Paris and Saigon.) In a lengthy discussion with Dillon on October 25, La Chambre declared that this statement was untrue and a direct personal reflection on himself, General Ely, and the honor of the French Government.

The French also considered that the United States decision to initiate a military advisory and training program under MAAG was diametrically opposed to the agreement reached in Washington in September. While agreeing that the channel for United States aid should be direct to the individual Associated States, the French were of the opinion that a firm decision had been reached in Washington that tripartite committees should be set up in each of the Associated States to decide what form French and United States aid should take and how it should be divided. La Chambre also pointed out that unilateral direct military aid would create difficulties because France was a guarantor of the Vietnamese cease-fire and hence had to be fully informed regarding both imports of material and changes of military personnel.

La Chambre wound up the long interview with the impassioned statement that "we prefer to lose in Vietnam with the U.S. rather than to win without them," and "we would rather support Diem, knowing he is going to lose, and thus keep France-U.S. solidarity than to pick someone who could retain Vietnam for the free world if this meant breaking Franco-U.S. solidarity." He concluded by praising the teamwork that had evolved between Ely and Heath in Saigon and expressed the hope that existing difficulties could be promptly settled so that Ely and Heath could get on with the job.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 1718, Oct. 24, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 1737, Oct. 25, 1954, top secret.

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On October 30, Dillon delivered to Mendès-France a personal message from Dulles in which the Secretary declared that the United States did not have the "slightest idea of questioning the good faith" of the French Government in carrying out the agreed policies of the two countries in Indochina. He pointed out, however, that "many French officials have not concealed their belief that Diem has failed, creating an impasse in Saigon, and that he should be replaced." Dulles explained that he considered the delivery of President Eisenhower's letter to Diem to be in "furtherance of the understandings reached in Washington," and designed to stimulate the Vietnamese Government under Diem--"and particularly the Vietnamese military organization"--to concentrate on imperative tasks which required urgent Vietnamese attention.

With respect to the French view that tripartite groups were to be set up in each of the Associated States, Dulles said that there was "no question concerning need and importance of coordination." He observed, however: "I am certain that you fully recognize also that the U.S. alone must of necessity control and administer funds which are appropriated by our Congress for direct aid." In lieu of formal tripartite machinery to administer aid programs, the Secretary favored informal coordination which would provide a "full exchange of views and information to prevent duplication and wasted effort and to avoid action without our knowing each other's views and without pooling our knowledge of the facts."

Dulles acknowledged that "there may remain some differences of emphasis between us on certain details on procedure or timing, but I am sure we are in agreement on our basic goals" in Indochina. The Secretary concluded: "I am convinced France and the U.S. must work for establishment of a government of national union around Diem to enable us to succeed in reaching our common goal of a strong and independent government in Free Vietnam."<sup>1</sup>

Mendès-France told Dillon that his main concern was that the United States and France work so closely together on a day-to-day basis that there could be no possibility for them to be played off one against the other in Vietnam. He expressed

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 1565, Oct. 29, 1954, top secret.

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the opinion that it would have been better if, in view of the time which had elapsed since the Washington talks, the United States had conferred with the French prior to the delivery of the Eisenhower letter to Diem, both regarding its contents and the date and method of delivery. He also said that, according to the information he had received, there had been no improvement in the situation in Saigon but, rather, a continuation of the steady deterioration which had characterized South Vietnam for some time.<sup>1</sup>

At the request of Mendès-France, Dillon took up Dulles' message with La Chambre, who accepted the text "with little comment". La Chambre suggested that one way of improving United States-French coordination of policy and of avoiding misunderstandings would be to delegate a greater degree of authority to the top American and French representatives in Saigon. These individuals, according to La Chambre, could study problems on the spot, make formal recommendations, and take joint action on their own responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

Despatch and Initial Recommendations of the  
Collins Mission

The suggestion made by La Chambre to Ambassador Dillon that the United States and French representatives in Saigon be given a greater degree of authority struck a responsive chord in Washington. On November 1, 1954, Dulles sent a message to Mendès-France saying that President Eisenhower agreed with the suggestion and had designated General Joseph Lawton Collins, USA, as Special United States Representative, with the personal rank of Ambassador, to coordinate United States activities designed "to help meet the threats to Vietnam's independence and security."

Dulles explained that Collins' mission, which was expected to last from sixty to ninety days, was of a temporary nature and that, after the departure of Ambassador Heath, General Collins would have "broad authority to direct, utilize and control all agencies and resources of the US Government with respect to

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 1839, Oct. 30, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 1835, Oct. 30, 1954, top secret.

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Vietnam." Dulles stated that Collins' previous wide contacts with French officials, particularly with General Ely, would enable him "to provide effective assistance in helping to meet urgent tasks in Vietnam." Dillon was instructed to convey this message and report urgently so that a public announcement of the mission could be made.<sup>1</sup>

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A similar message was sent to Ambassador Heath, with instructions to report President Diem's reaction and to inform General Ely.<sup>2</sup> In a separate message to Heath, Secretary Dulles explained that Collins' mission was two-fold: to "bridge the gap" between Heath's departure and the arrival of his successor (who at that time was to be Julian F. Harrington, Consul General in Hong Kong) and, at the same time, to inaugurate the United States "crash program" of aid to Vietnam. Dulles added that, since the military aspect of this crash program was so important, Washington believed that Collins' presence would be particularly useful.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 1608, Nov. 1, 1954, top secret. General Collins had served as United States Army Chief of Staff, 1949-1953, and in that capacity had visited Vietnam. At the time of his appointment to Saigon, he was the United States Representative on the Military Committee of NATO, from which position he was relieved to undertake his new mission. General Ely had been French representative on the NATO Standing Group in Washington in 1953.

<sup>2</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1809, Nov. 1, 1954, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1807, Nov. 1, 1954, top secret. The idea of sending a "special emissary on temporary mission" to cover the hiatus between Heath's departure and the arrival of the new Ambassador had been put forth by Dulles early in September. Heath (who had been assigned to Saigon in June 1950) was due to leave around December 1, 1954. (From Manila, DULTE 9, Sept. 5, 1954, top secret; to Manila, TEDUL 31, Sept. 8, 1954, secret.) As it developed, Harrington was not assigned to Saigon; G. Frederick Reinhardt, Counselor of Embassy in Paris, whose appointment was confirmed April 20, 1955, was sent in his stead.

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Mendès-France was described as "pleased and entirely agreeable" to the immediate announcement of the Collins mission.<sup>1</sup> After thinking it over for about three hours, Diem informed Heath that he would be happy to welcome Collins in his new capacity, but he asked that the Vietnamese Ambassador in Washington be consulted prior to the public announcement.<sup>2</sup> General Ely had some doubts about the wisdom of sending Collins to Saigon. He stated that such action would create a very bad impression in France and in Free Vietnam and would be exploited by the Viet Minh. He also said that such a move would be taken to mean that the United States was going to take over Indochina.<sup>3</sup>

After receiving the approval of Paris and Saigon, Dulles conferred with President Eisenhower and General Collins on November 3, 1954. Dulles carried with him to the White House a suggested letter of instructions to General Collins which was approved by the President. The letter outlined the basic policies of the United States as follows:

"1. To maintain and support a friendly and independent non-Communist government in Viet-Nam and to assist it in diminishing and ultimately eradicating Communist subversion and influence.

"2. To assist the Government of Viet-Nam to develop and maintain forces necessary for internal security and to foster economic conditions which will strengthen and promote the survival of a Free Viet-Nam.

"3. To provide United States assistance directly to the Government of Viet-Nam and to coordinate information and exchange of views on such assistance with Vietnamese and French authorities.

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 1858, Nov. 2, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1675, Nov. 2, 1954, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1686, Nov. 3, 1954, top secret. The Department sought to allay Ely's apprehensions (to Saigon, tel. 1867, Nov. 5, 1954, secret).

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"4. To encourage expanding relationships between Free Viet-Nam and its non-Communist neighbors, and support for Free Viet-Nam by the free world."

The letter also stated that the principal task of the General's mission was to coordinate and direct a program in support of the "legal government of Viet-Nam under the premiership of Ngo Dinh Diem" to enable the government to "(a) promote internal security and political and economic stability, (b) establish and maintain control throughout the territory, and (c) effectively counteract Viet Minh infiltration and paramilitary activities south of the military demarcation line [the 17th parallel]." The letter expressed the hope that the General would obtain the cooperation of the French authorities in the discharge of his mission.<sup>1</sup>

The White House made public the despatch of the Collins Mission on November 3, 1954,<sup>2</sup> and General Collins was en route the following day.<sup>3</sup> He arrived in Saigon on November 8.<sup>4</sup>

When passing through Manila, on November 7, General Collins called on President Ramon Magsaysay and asked that the Philippine Government give consideration to an "early recognition" of Diem's government. Magsaysay replied that, as long as the French "were really controlling" the Government of Vietnam, the Philippines could not extend recognition to Diem. He stated that he was willing, however, to cooperate in training Vietnamese military forces. Magsaysay suggested

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<sup>1</sup>Text of letter enclosed in Memorandum for the President, carried by Dulles to the White House, Nov. 3, 1954, top secret; memorandum by Dulles (S) of conference with President Eisenhower and General Collins, Nov. 3, 1954, secret. Apparently the President's letter of instructions to General Collins was put on White House stationery, but no copy has been found in the Department's files.

<sup>2</sup>Department of State Bulletin, Nov. 22, 1954, pp. 777-778.

<sup>3</sup>Circ. tel. 229 to Bangkok, Canberra, Djakarta, and other posts, Nov. 4, 1954, secret.

<sup>4</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1806, Nov. 12, 1954, official use only.

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that the Vietnamese follow the scheme which he had used in the pacification of the Huks (in Central Luzon a few years earlier) and pointed out that the Vietnamese military forces could play an important role in pacification of the countryside, resettlement, and in building public works in new settlements. He agreed with the concept of organizing Vietnamese forces for internal security and relying on the recently concluded Manila Pact for the protection of Vietnam against external aggression.<sup>1</sup>

After being at his post for one week (and in response to Secretary Dulles' request made in connection with the forthcoming visit of Mendès-France to Washington<sup>2</sup>), General Collins submitted a long report on the requirements of the military situation in South Vietnam. Collins based his recommendations on the fact that "General Ely has questioned validity of our assumption that we can rely on threat of action under Manila pact to dissuade Viet Minh from renewing military operations against free Vietnam." Collins reported: "I agree with him that, until after the period now scheduled for elections [July 20, 1956], it will be necessary maintain sufficient combat forces, both French and Vietnamese, to furnish reasonable assurance that country could not be quickly overrun pending action by Manila pact powers."

Collins opened his report with a not very encouraging appraisal of Diem, whom he described as "a small, shy, diffident man with almost no personal magnetism" and as one who "evidently lacks confidence in himself and appears have an inherent distaste for decisive action." Collins acknowledged that he was "not now prepared to express a general judgment on Diem," but he confessed that he was "by no means certain he [Diem] has inherent capacity to manage country during this critical period," and Collins observed that "each passing day of indecisiveness is bound to lessen any confidence that people may have in his [Diem's] government."

Collins then proceeded to comment on the important question of the "pervasive" French presence in Vietnam. He pointed out that "if expeditionary corps were withdrawn

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1789, Nov. 10, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Saigon, tel. 1939, Nov. 11, 1954, secret.

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prematurely, results could be disastrous." He cautioned, too, that "it would be unwise for us to attempt to displace French capital and French advisers in fields of banking, currency controls and allied business matters," for "any such move could impose on us obligations which might be onerous and long drawn out as those we assumed in Philippines and Korea."

Taking these considerations into account, Collins formulated his military recommendations, which boiled down basically to the following four points:

(1) It was essential that a portion of the French Expeditionary Corps be retained to provide protection to Free Vietnam against external aggression.

(2) The United States should continue to subsidize the French Expeditionary Corps financially (in the amount of at least \$100,000,000) during the calendar year 1955, as encouragement to the French to retain sufficient forces there.<sup>1</sup>

(3) The Vietnamese defense forces should be reduced from 170,000 to approximately 84,000 military personnel (principally Army, with small elements of Navy and Air Force) by July 1, 1955, at an annual cost to the United States of about \$200,000,000, and the Vietnamese National Army should be placed under Vietnamese command and control no later than that date.

(4) The United States should assume training responsibility for the Vietnamese National Army on January 1, 1955, with French cooperation, and utilizing French training personnel.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Before departing from Saigon, Ambassador Heath, too, had stressed the importance of the retention of the French Expeditionary Corps and recommended that the United States continue to support it in 1955 on a financial scale somewhat reduced from that of 1954. (From Saigon, tel. 1761, Nov. 8, 1954, secret.)

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1830, Nov. 15, 1954, top secret.

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These recommendations Collins drew up in the form of a "Minute of Understanding on Development and Training of Autonomous Vietnam Armed Forces" which he submitted to General Ely for approval. On November 16, Ely and Collins conferred, and Ely indicated his readiness to accept the terms of the "Minute" except for the provision that all French personnel would gradually be removed from advisory positions. Ely maintained that no French Government or Assembly would agree to having U.S. personnel completely replace the French in training the Vietnamese armed forces.

Ely then raised the subject of general U.S. policy in Indochina and noted two tendencies. He pointed out that, formerly, the United States had urged France to build up the Vietnamese forces to a point where they could replace the French Expeditionary Corps; now, the United States contemplated a much smaller Vietnamese force to be given the limited mission of maintaining internal security. Ely did not object to this change, for he felt that the Vietnamese did not have the resources and trained personnel to raise a force of 200,000. At the same time, however, the United States was expecting the FEC to defend Vietnam against external aggression while reducing the aid necessary to maintain the FEC in the face of growing strength of the Viet Minh. As Ely saw it, the U.S. solution seemed to be to urge French ratification of the Manila Pact without suggesting how military action of the Manila Pact powers could be concerted and brought to bear in an emergency.

Collins replied that the basic assumption in the United States was that the Communists were not likely to renew overt aggression in Indochina and that therefore large forces in Vietnam, which in any case could not alone assure the defense of the country, were not essential. The concept was to develop such minimum blocking forces as would convince the enemy that he would be opposed and could not attack cheaply and easily overrun territory before the signatories of the Manila Pact could take action against the aggressor. Collins also assured Ely that he had recommended that the United States provide some support for the FEC "for some time to come".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1854, Nov. 16, 1954, secret.

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Franco-American Discussion of Vietnamese Policy,  
Washington, November 18-20, 1954

It was against the background of growing French suspicion of American motives and policy in Vietnam, as revealed in the first week of the Collins mission, that Premier Mendès-France came to Washington on November 18 for an intensive review of French and United States policies in Europe, North Africa, and, especially, Southeast Asia. In his discussions with Secretary Dulles, Mendès-France reaffirmed French policy as being to assist in building a strong, free Vietnam as a counterpart to Communist North Vietnam. Dulles stated that a compromise with the Communists would mean loss of the area. He also stated that the United States objective was, if possible, to build indigenous power, authority and military strength within the formula of national independence, which would mean, Dulles observed, a gradual lessening of the French role and activity.

Mendès-France showed particular sensitivity to actions tending to liquidate the French position in Indochina. He recognized United States primary responsibility in Asia, but emphasized that the French could make a contribution. Dulles denied that the Far East was an exclusive responsibility of the United States and pointed out that both France and Britain had interests in the area. He explained that the United States had no desire to supplant the French in Indochina, but he expressed the belief that French authority and control would be replaced by indigenous forces. He added that the United States purpose in Indochina was not to compete with the French for influence and popularity, but to try to save Free Vietnam.

On the question of coordination of aid, Mendès-France pressed for formal tripartite committees with periodic review at the governmental level. Secretary Dulles agreed to such review, but rejected fixed machinery of formal tripartite or bipartite committees for field coordination. Dulles indicated that he preferred the flexibility of the informal method of coordination by the respective representatives in the field, in cooperation with appropriate officials of the local government. He agreed on the need for the French and United States representatives to work closely and informally together to avoid overlapping and any tendency on the part of local governments to play off the French and Americans against each other. When Mendès-France suggested including the United Kingdom in the coordinating committees, the Secretary replied that flexibility

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was required and that inclusion of the United Kingdom would lead to a request from Australia and others to be included, which would make coordinating machinery unwieldy.<sup>1</sup>

Dulles and Mendès-France incorporated their conclusions on the question of coordination of aid in common instructions sent to the French and United States representatives in the three Associated States. These instructions stated that the conferees had decided to hold periodic bilateral discussions in Washington to "supplement" the aid provisions of the Smith-La Chambre "Minute of Understanding" of September 29.<sup>2</sup>

Respecting the political situation in South Vietnam, Dulles emphasized the importance of having the United States and France work together in support of a government formed around Diem. Mendès-France stated that the French had agreed in the September talks to support Diem although they had not been optimistic about his abilities. He also said that the French believed that, within a few months, they and the Americans would be forced to consider the replacement of Diem. The French Premier said that he had no one to propose at that time, but he stressed his belief that some Vietnamese who had worked with the French in the past had much better records than did Diem. He went on to say that the time had come for France and the United States to give Diem some specific advice, particularly with respect to agrarian reform, establishment of an efficient administration, and attention to the rural areas.

Mendès-France suggested that Diem be given a certain amount of time to work out a program and that the United States and France consult in a month or two to see what action he had taken. Mendès-France asked if the United States was prepared to make a joint approach to Diem along this line. Dulles replied that, although he had no objection, he believed that experts should get together to define specific proposals to be made and decide on the question of timing and manner of presentation. He also said that, while the United States was agreeable to working with France on this matter, it did not want to be committed to making a joint approach in every case, and that it reserved the right to consult alone with the Diem government.

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2070 (161 to Phnom Penh, 108 to Vientiane), Nov. 22, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2055 (159 to Phnom Penh, 105 to Vientiane), Nov. 20, 1954, secret.

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Mendès-France introduced the matter of Bao Dai, stating that he wanted to return to Vietnam, and asked for an expression of United States views. Dulles replied that, while not in position to advise, the United States was opposed to Bao Dai's returning.

On the question of French relations with the Viet Minh, Mendès-France explained that he had designated Jean Sainteny as Delegate General of France in North Vietnam in August of 1954 for the purpose of looking after French interests in the north. Dulles expressed concern lest the proposed letter to the Viet Minh authorities setting forth Sainteny's terms of reference should be taken to imply recognition of the regime which question the United States wished to avoid.

The Secretary went on to say that there appeared to be belief in some quarters that a compromise between North and South Vietnam was inevitable, but the United States felt that a rapprochement would inevitably result in the loss of the area to the Communists. He also stated that, if the Viet Minh got a majority in the national government as a result of the nationwide elections scheduled to be held by July 1956, the minority would not long survive; the object, therefore, was to build a strong anti-Communist government in South Vietnam, one not seeking accommodation with the Viet Minh. Mendès-France expressed agreement, saying that cooperation between North and South Vietnam would have bad results and that the only thing to do was to develop political strength in South Vietnam as a counter to the north.<sup>1</sup>

With respect to the military aspects of the Vietnamese problem, Mendès-France objected particularly to those portions of Collins' proposed "minute of understanding" dealing with the training of the Vietnamese Army which would lead to the displacement of French military influence by that of the United States. The Secretary replied that the basic question was who was to be responsible for the training, also which method--United States or France--were to be used. He also indicated that, if the training job were to be a United States responsibility, this did not mean that French personnel were to be

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2112, Nov. 24, 1954, secret.

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eliminated. The conferees decided to refer the training issue back to Collins and Ely for further study and agreed recommendation.

Mendès-France stated that the French Expeditionary Corps would be reduced to 100,000 men by the end of 1955 and expressed hope that the United States would continue to support the Corps financially. The Secretary replied that this question had to be considered in connection with other United States programs-- economic and technical aid, and other military aid in Indochina.

On the matter of the size of the Vietnamese forces, the Secretary explained that the United States theory was to have adequate local forces to maintain order against subversion and to serve as a small blocking force against external attack, with reliance for the principal deterrent on the obligations under the Manila Pact. He also said that the United States did not feel it was possible to build up local forces strong enough to throw back an invasion, and that United States support of Vietnamese forces would cost about \$200,000,000 a year. Mendès-France said that he understood the general principles, which appeared sensible to him, and added that this question should be studied by military experts on the spot and left up to Generals Ely and Collins, whose recommendations Paris would accept. He also commented that he could not see what a Vietnamese National Army of about 90,000 men could accomplish except, perhaps, maintain internal order.<sup>1</sup>

Although the conferees in Washington had "supplemented" the Smith-La Chambre "Minute of Understanding" to the extent of making a rather vague concession to the French request for joint Franco-American planning at the local level in Saigon, the November talks proved very inconclusive. Indeed, they had served largely to point up continued divisions between Washington and Paris regarding the respective roles France and the United States were to play in Vietnam. In furtherance of their efforts to reach a better understanding and in accordance with their agreement "to hold periodic bilateral discussions in Washington at a high level to review developments, exchange information and evaluate progress," Secretary Dulles and Mendès-

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2046, Nov. 19, 1954, top secret, and tel. 2126, Nov. 26, 1954, secret.

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France tentatively set December 22 as the next occasion on which to conduct such a review.<sup>1</sup> It soon became obvious that there would also be "corridor discussions" about Vietnam at the mid-December NATO Ministerial Meeting in Paris, and the United States set about preparing the position it would take in these discussions.

Collins' Further Recommendations on Vietnam,  
and the Ely-Collins Memorandum on Training  
of Vietnamese Forces by MAAG, Initialed December 13, 1954

The views of General Collins in Saigon were to influence the position taken by the United States in its talks with the French in Paris. In the execution of his mission, Collins worked closely with both President Diem and General Ely. After having been in Saigon for three weeks, Collins reported that he expected to concentrate on developing, in cooperation with the French, a series of programs for buttressing South Vietnam, covering the following major fields: (1) Vietnamese Armed Forces, including size, composition, mission, training, use in pacification and development of loyalty to the civil government; (2) strengthening Diem's Government, including rendering advice on filling Cabinet posts; (3) resettlement of refugees and displaced persons; (4) land reform; (5) formation of a National Assembly; (6) financial and economic programs, including United States direct aid to Vietnam; and (7) educational and technical training.<sup>2</sup>

A week later, on December 6, Collins informed Washington that his negotiations with the French in developing agreed programs were proceeding satisfactorily. He stated that Diem was still his "chief problem" and gave examples of Diem's lack of administrative ability and political finesse in organizing an effective government. One of the problems concerned the reluctance of Diem to appoint Dr. Phan Huy Quat as Minister of Defense, the post Quat had held in the Buu Loc Cabinet during the first half of 1954. The appointment of a vigorous Minister of Defense had become all the more important with Bao Dai's

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2055, Nov. 20, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tels. 2004, 2024, Nov. 29, 30, 1954, both secret.

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dismissal of General Hinh as Vietnamese Chief of Staff.<sup>1</sup> Collins also commented on the conflicting pressures to which Diem was subjected--the sects, his family, "to say nothing of the French and Americans"--as well as Bao Dai's "long-distance wire pulling" and influence in Vietnamese Army circles and in other fields. Collins concluded that, while the situation was not entirely hopeless, it was essential that some thought be given to finding an alternative to Diem "acceptable to Vietnamese, French, Bao Dai and ourselves." Collins' final sentence was: "Nevertheless, we shall be forced to this expedient if Diem has not demonstrated by about January 1 that he is capable of governing."<sup>2</sup>

At the request of Secretary Dulles, Collins' analysis of the situation was discussed with Senator Mike Mansfield by Assistant Secretary of State Walter S. Robertson on December 7, 1954. The Senator stated that the United States should continue to exert its efforts and use its resources, even if it might cost a lot, to hold Vietnam as long as possible, and that any other course would have a disastrous effect on Cambodia, Laos, and Southeast Asia. The Senator saw no alternative to Diem as Prime Minister and, while recognizing Diem's weaknesses as an administrator and manager, Mansfield felt that the United States should continue to back Diem, who represented what small hope there might be in building something in Vietnam. The Senator was certain that the refugees and many of the Catholic bishops and church officials would oppose the replacement of Diem, and he was against relinquishing even the small chance the United States had with Diem for some unknown and untried combination.

The Senator expressed the opinion that Diem, unlike most of the Vietnamese, really was honest, incorruptible and a devoutly dedicated nationalist as well. In the Senator's opinion, General Collins' time limit of January 1 was playing with political dynamite, because it would give Diem an awfully short time in which to show results or be replaced. Senator Mansfield thought that Diem should be encouraged not only to

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2006, Nov. 29, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2108, Dec. 6, 1954, top secret.

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delegate responsibilities to trusted and capable ministers, but also to accept a certain amount of compromise.<sup>1</sup> Senator Mansfield's views were transmitted without comment by the Department to General Collins the following day.<sup>2</sup>

In reply to the Department's request for his views, for use in connection with the expected corridor discussions of the Indochina problem at the NATO Ministerial Meeting in Paris,<sup>3</sup> General Collins, on December 13, submitted a long report on the confusing and chaotic political scene. He said that, according to Diem, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sect leaders in the government had declared that they would withdraw and had threatened open rebellion if Quat were appointed to the post of Minister of Defense. General Ely, however, supported Quat's appointment. Collins stated that he was convinced that Diem and his brothers (Luyen and Nhu) were "afraid to turn over control of armed forces to Quat or any other strong man", and that "they may also fear Quat as potential successor to Diem and hence are doing everything they can to keep him out of any post in government."

As Collins saw it, there were three possible courses of action for the United States in Vietnam: (1) continue support of the Diem Government, (2) support the establishment of another government "which may be able to save the situation", or (3) gradually withdraw support from Vietnam. Collins indicated that there were risks in pursuing the first course. He went on to say that, since he had grave misgivings about Diem's chance of success, he believed that the United States should consider replacing Diem, and he suggested two alternatives: (a) have Bao Dai name Quat to replace Diem as President of the Council of Ministers, or (b) have Bao Dai return to Vietnam, "assume Presidency of Council and rally entire nation to unified action." Although he considered American withdrawal the least

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<sup>1</sup>Memorandum by Young (PSA) of conversation among Mansfield, Robertson (FE) and Morton (H), Dec. 7, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2333, Dec. 8, 1954, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Saigon, tels. 2305, Dec. 7, 1954, secret, and 2378, Dec. 10, 1954, top secret.

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desirable course of action, he stated that "in all honesty and in view of what I have observed here to date it is possible this may be only sound solution." In summarizing his report Collins stated that he wanted to reserve final judgment on Diem until the early part of January, and that alternatives to the support of Diem should be thoroughly explored within the United States Government. He recommended that Washington "continue to support Diem at Paris", and that the United States not consider with the French the alternatives regarding the establishment of another government "until after I have communicated my final judgment to Department."<sup>1</sup>

Assistant Secretary Robertson again consulted Senator Mansfield, who, on December 15, reiterated his previously expressed views. The Senator continued to believe that the United States should support Diem but make clear the desirability and necessity for Diem to cooperate with the United States in return. Senator Mansfield feared that replacement of Diem would create seriously increased confusion and even anarchy. According to the Department, the Senator was of the opinion that, "if Diem and Vietnamese cannot with our support create reasonable effective setup in Vietnam, or if French are sub rosa manipulating deal with Viet Minh at expense Free Vietnam, only choice for US is withdrawal effort bolster Free Vietnam." With regard to Bao Dai's return to Saigon, the Senator expressed considerable skepticism and reluctance.<sup>2</sup>

The failure of Diem to appoint Quat as Minister of Defense was the final development which convinced Collins, on December 16, that "Diem does not have the capacity to unify divided factions in Vietnam." Collins again suggested that consideration be given to the return of Bao Dai to Saigon in an effort "to galvanize the country into unified action," and help resolve the parochial attitudes of the contending political factions. In this report, Collins recommended re-evaluation of United States plans for assisting Southeast Asia. He also recommended that, while supporting Diem for a short while longer, the United States should not conclude formal agreements to assume responsibility

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2250, Dec. 13, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2444, Dec. 15, 1954, top secret.

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on January 1, 1955, for training Vietnamese forces or for giving direct military aid for specific force levels "until decision reached in Washington as to our ultimate policy and commitments" in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>

The American commitment to take over the training of Vietnamese forces had already been made by Collins himself three days earlier. Following four weeks of negotiation, Collins and Ely initialed, on December 13, 1954, a memorandum of understanding on the development and training of autonomous Vietnamese Armed Forces which was designed to reflect United States and French cooperative efforts in Vietnam. The main feature of this understanding was that the Chief of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), using both United States and French personnel, would be responsible, effective January 1, 1955, for the organization and training of the Vietnamese military forces. He would perform this duty under the overall authority of the Commander-in-Chief in Indochina (General Ely) who had the responsibility for the strategic direction of the French and Vietnamese forces to secure Vietnam against external aggression and internal subversion. The understanding also provided that (1) France would grant "full autonomy" to the Vietnamese Armed Forces by July 1, 1955; (2) the Vietnamese force structure which the United States would support would be reduced to approximately 84,000 by that date; (3) the US-French arrangement provided for in the memorandum was subject to the consent of the Government of Vietnam.<sup>2</sup>

Washington approved the Collins-Ely memorandum on December 16 and voiced hope that Paris would do likewise in the immediate future.<sup>3</sup> What General Ely was willing to agree to in Saigon proved more difficult, however, to sell to the Government of Premier Pierre Mendès-France in Paris.

Talks on Vietnam at the NATO Ministerial Meeting,  
Paris, December 16-18, 1954

With the ink scarcely dry on a paper it was unlikely the French would accept without modifications, and with the future

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2303, Dec. 16, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2261, Dec. 14, 1954, confidential.

<sup>3</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2457, (2249 to Paris), Dec. 16, 1954, secret.

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indicated that this raised a real problem with respect to training the Vietnamese and would require continuing the use of French military personnel. Eden seemed much reassured.

As the meeting was breaking up, Dulles said he agreed with a suggestion which had been made that the informal bilateral U.S.-French meeting to be held in Washington for an exchange of views on Indochina should be expanded to include the United Kingdom. Dulles stressed the need for secrecy, in view of the unfavorable reaction which would be caused in Australia and New Zealand and the Associated States if word leaked out the Big Three were discussing Indochina, a caveat with which Eden fully agreed.<sup>1</sup>

Tripartite discussions (Dulles-Eden-Mendès-France) on Indochina took place on December 18. Admiral Arthur W. Radford, USN, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Ambassador Dillon, and General Ely were among the advisers present. With respect to Vietnam, the discussion focused on the Diem leadership and the possibility of alternative solutions. In response to the French idea that alternatives be considered, Dulles defended Diem as the best man available in spite of failings; he added, however, that the United States was not committed to Diem in any irrevocable sense. Dulles also said that, while developments had confirmed United States fears as to Diem's limitations, no substitute for him had yet been proposed. Dulles expressed the view that the United States and France should continue to

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settlement. (British Embassy memorandum, undated, attached to memorandum by Young (PSA) to Snow (L/FE), Dec. 1, 1954, confidential.) In an opinion of December 6, 1954, the Assistant Legal Adviser for Far Eastern Affairs, Conrad E. Snow, intimated that he was in agreement with this British legal interpretation of the Geneva settlement. (Memorandum by Snow (L/FE) to Young (PSA), Dec. 6, 1954, confidential.)

<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. SECTO 11, Dec. 17, 1954, secret. The Australian Government let it be known in Paris and Washington that it had a vital interest in Far Eastern matters and that it wanted to be included in discussions dealing with the problems of Southeast Asia. (From Paris, tel. 2573, Dec. 16, 1954; memorandum by McConaughy, CA, of Conversations between Robertson, FE, and Australian Ambassador Sir Percy Spender, Dec. 18, 1954; both secret.)

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back Diem, but should exert more pressure on him to make necessary changes. Ely characterized Diem as an extremely pig-headed man who became more so under pressure and pointed out that to exert too much pressure on Diem was not in keeping with the new independent status of Vietnam. As for issuing an ultimatum to Diem, Dulles stated that he was opposed to doing so "until we know what we would do if it were rejected."

Mendès-France suggested that Bao Dai could be useful to put an alternate plan into effect if an ultimatum to Diem failed. Dulles felt that if an approach to Bao Dai were to be made "we must go to him prepared with our own ideas and not simply to accept his." Mendès-France then stated that the French were prepared to request Bao Dai to establish a viceroy in Saigon who would act as "supreme arbitrator to settle squabbles." Eden agreed that a "royal commission" of some sort should be set up. Dulles said that, in considering a viceroy, the conferees were advancing into the second problem without having solved the first, which was to create machinery "to implement our ideas." He went on to say that "we must exhaust all our pressures on Diem to get things done before considering alternate solutions." He also said that investigation of an alternate solution must be done carefully and that, for the present, Diem must be supported.

Mendès-France agreed, and he summarized the discussion by stating that he had three points he wanted Collins and Ely to study: (1) support of Diem,<sup>1</sup> (2) alternatives to Diem, "including Bao Dai", and (3) question of timing. With reference to the last point, Mendès-France asked: "How much further delay [by Diem] can be tolerated?" He went on to say that the conferees must set a deadline, and that Collins and Ely must come to a conclusion and make precise recommendations so that the conferees could take necessary decisions.

Secretary Dulles stated that a fourth point had to be added, namely, that, if the United States should decide that there was no good alternative to Diem, it would have to re-appraise its policy and consider how much more investment it

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<sup>1</sup>Subsequently, Ambassador Dillon reported to the Department that the French Premier's first point was the possibility of appointment of a viceroy. (From Paris, tel. 2697, Dec. 26, 1954, top secret.)

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would be prepared to make in Indochina. After indicating that, for the United States, the question of Vietnam had domestic political overtones, since Senator Mansfield and Congressional Committees were "intensely interested" in the problem, the Secretary stated his belief that even the slight chance of success in Vietnam was worth considerable investment. He said that the United States had to think of what might happen in adjacent countries--Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Malaya. Dulles pointed out that the United States situation was different from that of the French, that the latter had an investment in lives and property in Vietnam whereas the United States was concerned with the effect that the fate of Vietnam would have on the rest of Southeast Asia. Mendès-France sympathized with the United States problem and hoped that the United States would not arrive at a negative conclusion. In indicating agreement, Eden stated that he felt that even an additional single year of sustained effort would help everywhere, and that "we must try to keep up the fight in order to give confidence to others" in the area.

Eden brought up the question of training of Vietnamese forces and asked about the United States position on introducing new military advisers and possible conflict with the Geneva Agreements. Dulles stated (and Admiral Radford confirmed) that, while the United States was rotating MAAG personnel, it was not increasing the number. Ely stated that the Collins-Ely memorandum of understanding on training remained within the framework of the Geneva Accords. Mendès-France said that the French Government would have to study the text of the memorandum from the legal point of view to insure that it was fully in accord with the Armistice. He stated that determination of the legality of the Collins-Ely memorandum was particularly important because the Viet Minh had already protested officially to the International Control Commission regarding the United States assumption of training responsibility. Secretary Dulles expressed general agreement with the principle that the Geneva Accords should not be broken but stated that interpretation of them must not be so refined as to prevent substitution of more competent for less competent personnel. Following a general discussion on Viet Minh protests of violation of the Geneva Accords, Dulles concluded by saying that it would be unfortunate if the Western Powers were to find themselves on the defensive in this matter in the light of the smuggling of military material into North Vietnam from China and the persecution of Catholics by the Viet Minh.

  
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During the discussions, Mendès-France stated that he doubted it was necessary to hold the projected tripartite meeting in Washington on December 22 as planned. Dulles agreed, and Eden concurred, with the proviso that the meeting be postponed rather than cancelled. Mention was made that the meeting might be held in the latter half of January. By that time, Dulles stated, the problems to be decided would be so basic that the Ministers would probably want to decide them personally rather than have them considered by a working group. Mendès-France and Eden concurred, with Eden adding that a working group meeting might be useful in any event for purposes of information and coordination.<sup>1</sup> After a prolonged discussion, the conferees decided not to issue any communiqué on the conversations.<sup>2</sup> In accordance with previous practice, the representatives of the Associated States in Paris were informed of the discussion.<sup>3</sup>

Negotiation of a Substitute for the Ely-Collins Memorandum

Upon returning to Washington from Paris, Dulles reviewed the basic factors of the Vietnamese problem in messages of December 24, 1954, to Collins in Saigon and Dillon in Paris. Dulles pointed out that (1) the situation in South Vietnam had not disintegrated since the Geneva settlement; (2) since the withdrawal of United States support would hasten a Communist takeover of Vietnam and have adverse repercussions in all of Southeast Asia, United States investment in Vietnam was justified even if only to buy time to build up strength elsewhere in the area; and (3), unless the situation in Free Vietnam clearly appeared hopeless and rapidly disintegrating, the United States had no choice but to continue its aid to Viet-Nam and its support of Diem for there was "no other suitable leader known to us." Dulles went on to say that French and Vietnamese approval of the Collins-Ely memorandum of understanding on training of the Vietnamese Army was the

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 2599, Dec. 19, 1954, secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 2601, Dec. 19, 1954, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Paris, tel. SECTO 24, Dec. 19, 1954, secret.

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basic need and that "only when we have taken steps reorganize and revitalize National Army can we hope for improved security condition and lessening Communist influence [in] Free Vietnam."<sup>1</sup> In another instruction of the same day to the American Embassy in Paris, the Department characterized the Collins-Ely memorandum as the keystone of the effort to create a strong, stable Vietnam.<sup>2</sup>

Although French officials in the Quai d'Orsay and in the Ministry for the Associated States appreciated the urgency of the American request for approval of the Ely-Collins memorandum, they indicated to the American Embassy on December 27 and 31, 1954, that the French Government objected to the form rather than the substance of the memorandum. The question of the legality of substituting training personnel for administrative personnel in the MAAG was not disputed. The French officials stated that Paris did not want to present to the Vietnamese Government what would appear to be a signed Franco-American agreement which it had no choice but to carry out, and that the memorandum of understanding would have to be redrafted to take the form of recommendations for consideration by the Vietnamese Government.

The Embassy in Paris commented to the Department on December 31, 1954, that the French attitude was prompted to a considerable extent by internal political considerations.<sup>4</sup> Ambassador Dillon had reported a few days earlier that the Collins-Ely memorandum posed a major political problem for the Mendès-France government which might cause considerable delay in its approval. He said that a bilateral United States-French agreement giving the United States primary responsibility for training the Vietnamese Army would be unpopular with all shades of opinion in the French National Assembly. Dillon explained

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2585 (2324 to Paris), Dec. 24, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 2323, Dec. 24, 1954, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Paris, tels. 2703 and 2770, Dec. 27 and 31, 1954, both top secret.

<sup>4</sup>From Paris, tel. 2776, Dec. 31, 1954, top secret.

  
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that the Socialists and Left Wing elements would oppose it as provocative and in violation of the Armistice, and that the Right Wing elements would probably oppose it as an unacceptable abdication on the part of France. Dillon also stated that public knowledge of such an agreement would form a valid reason for an interpellation in the National Assembly which the Mendès-France government could probably not survive.<sup>1</sup>

The official French position was finally communicated to the United States on January 7, 1955. The French proposed that the text of the Collins-Ely memorandum be altered and recast in the form of joint recommendations to the Vietnamese Government. In addition, the French Embassy handed the Department a note which made the following points in favor of the suggested changes: (1) The sovereignty of Vietnam gave it the right to determine the conditions of training and the structure of its army; hence, the United States and France could only make recommendations. (2) The French High Command, which was responsible for the execution of the Cease-Fire Agreement, could not accept any measure which did not conform to that Agreement and, in this connection, (a) the size of the MAAG could not be augmented beyond the 342 present when the cease-fire went into effect, and (b) the substitution of training personnel for administrative personnel within this ceiling should be accomplished discreetly in a manner acceptable to the ICC.<sup>2</sup>

Collins, who felt that the French were stalling, was greatly disturbed by this attempt to rewrite the memorandum of understanding. He pointed out from Saigon, on January 9, 1955, that the French proposal made no reference to granting autonomy to the Vietnamese forces and that it included circumscribing details which would tend to hamstring the implementation of the training program. Collins urged a "flat refusal" of the French proposal and stated that he would not agree to it "unless

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 2697, Dec. 26, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 2870, and to Paris, tel. 2766, both Jan. 7, 1955, top secret.

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specifically instructed by high authority."<sup>1</sup> Three days later, Collins strongly recommended that the Department urge the French Government to abandon its proposed revision of the memorandum and to authorize Ely to work out with Collins the details of the implementation of the signed document.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of rejecting the French revision, the Department on January 14, 1955, instructed the American Chargé in Paris to explain the United States position to Mendès-France in the following terms:

(1) Collins had no intention of presenting the memorandum of understanding to the Vietnamese Government; instead, he intended to negotiate United States direct aid and Vietnamese force levels with Diem on the basis of the agreed understanding between himself and Ely on those matters requiring French-United States concurrence.

(2) Furthermore, Collins had no intention of derogating from Vietnamese sovereignty; it was his desire to enhance it.

(3) The joint recommendations proposed by the French were consistent to a degree with the Collins-Ely memorandum, but they omitted certain points which the United States considered to be important.

(4) The Department assumed that the French Government did not wish to repudiate or to change the substance of the memorandum.

The Chargé was also to seek specific confirmation that the French would negotiate with the Vietnamese to bring about the autonomy of the Vietnamese armed forces by July 1, 1955. If Mendès-France agreed to the foregoing, the Chargé was to seek his further

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2660, Jan. 9, 1955, top secret. Collins also expressed to Ely his concern over the French Government's delay in approving their joint memorandum. (From Saigon, tel. 2663, Jan. 10, 1955, top secret.)

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2707, Jan. 12, 1955, secret.

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agreement that he and Secretary Dulles would instruct Ely and Collins to proceed in a manner consistent with their signed understanding.<sup>1</sup>

When the American Chargé saw Mendès-France on January 16, 1955, the latter confirmed the Department's assumption with respect to the French Government's attitude on the substance of the Collins-Ely understanding and on the autonomy of the Vietnamese armed forces. Mendès-France stated that his only concern had been to avoid any grounds for belief that the understanding violated the Geneva Armistice.<sup>2</sup> In a discussion with the American Chargé the next day, officials of the Quai d'Orsay stated that the French Government was prepared to give the United States assurances regarding the autonomy of the Vietnamese armed forces.<sup>3</sup>

It soon developed that there was no meeting of the minds between Washington and Paris as to which document--the Collins-Ely understanding or the French revision of January 7--was to be the controlling one. On January 18, the Department reiterated the United States position to Pierre Millet, French Minister in Washington, as follows:

(1) The United States had no intention to pass the Collins-Ely memorandum on to the Vietnamese or to make it public.

(2) Because the memorandum was a United States-French agreement, the Department considered that this text should be the basis for field implementation.

(3) If the French had to make some public explanation in the future, the Department had no objection to their using the revised version as a purely French description of the Collins-Ely

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 2526, Jan. 14, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 2996, Jan. 16, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Paris, tel. 3010, Jan. 17, 1955, top secret.

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memorandum, so long as the December 13 agreement remained the only agreed official basis for field operations.<sup>1</sup>

Officials of the Quai d'Orsay, however, made it clear to the American Embassy that the French Government was not prepared to accept or formally approve the December 13 document as the basis for an approach to the Vietnamese Government.<sup>2</sup>

The French position was further clarified by Minister Millet in Washington on January 21, 1955, when he informed the Department that the French Government wanted the French revision of January 7 to be the controlling document defining the U.S.-French relationship, and that the French wanted to give this text to the Vietnamese. In reply to Millet's inquiry as to what were the substantive differences between the two documents, Department officials pointed out that the French revision omitted any mention of autonomy of the Vietnamese Army, and they also indicated that the provisions governing the role of the MAAG required improvement. Department officials told Millet that, in view of General Collins' imminent return to Washington, the question of revising the agreement which he had prepared with Ely would be discussed with him.<sup>3</sup>

After taking the matter up with General Collins, Secretary Dulles sent a personal message to Mendès-France, on January 24, 1955, in an effort to resolve the impasse. Dulles wrote that the two points of difference could be taken care of by two letters. In the first instance, General Ely would send a letter to Diem stating that the Vietnamese National Army would be completely autonomous by July 1, 1955. Dulles explained that, although this was a matter to be agreed to between France and Vietnam, it was also a prerequisite to American financial support of the Vietnamese Army and to American assistance in training that Army. Ely would then send a letter to Collins outlining the role of the MAAG and specifying that:

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 2579, Jan. 19, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tels. 3045 and 3064, Jan. 19 and 20, 1955, both top secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Paris, tel. 2615 (3058 to Saigon), Jan. 22, 1955, top secret.

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"It is agreed that United States personnel will be assigned, together with French personnel, as advisers to and instructors of the Vietnamese armed forces. All U.S. and French advisory and training personnel assigned or detached to the Vietnamese armed forces will be under the direction of the Chief MAAG acting under the general authority of General Ely. As the efficiency of the Vietnamese armed forces increases, the number of US and French advisers and trainers will be decreased."

Dulles went on to say that, since the two questions could be settled in this manner, there was no longer any need for the Collins-Ely memorandum or the French revision thereof, and that these two letters would take the place of that memorandum. Dulles closed his message with the statement:

"I hope you will agree with me that this suggestion will permit us to end an argument which seems to me increasingly sterile. I also am sure that you understand that agreement on these two open matters is a prerequisite to the United States making the massive investment to preserve South Vietnam in freedom which is our purpose."<sup>1</sup>

Mendès-France's views were communicated to the American Embassy in Paris by Jacques Roux, Director of the Far East Section of the Quai d'Orsay, on January 28. Roux stated that the French Government accepted Dulles' suggested letters, except that it wanted the first two sentences in the letter on the MAAG from Ely to Collins to be combined to read:

"It is agreed that all US and French advisory and training personnel assigned or detached to the Vietnamese Armed Forces will be under the direction of the Chief MAAG acting under the general authority of the Commander in Chief."

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 2629, Jan. 24, 1955, top secret. Dulles also emphasized the importance he attached to the resolution of these questions when the newly appointed French Ambassador, Maurice Couve de Murville, called on him on January 28. (Memorandum by Merchant (EUR) of conversation between Dulles and Couve de Murville, Jan. 28, 1955, secret.)

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At the same time, the French Government wanted its January 7 proposal used in approaching the Vietnamese Government in order (1) to underline the joint nature of this Franco-American undertaking and (2) to have an agreed document that could, if necessary, be made public and should questions be raised in the French Parliament.<sup>1</sup>

Although somewhat skeptical of the efficacy of using the French proposal of January 7 as an "agreed document", the Department accepted the French counter-proposal. On February 1, the Department instructed the American Embassy in Paris to inform the Quai d'Orsay that the two letters in question and the text of the French proposal of January 7 would constitute a satisfactory substitute for the original Collins-Ely memorandum. At the same time the Department revised the proposed letter from Ely to Collins to read:

"It is agreed that all U.S. and French advisory and training personnel assigned or detached to the Vietnamese Armed Forces will be under the direction of the Chief MAAG acting under the general authority\* of the Commander in Chief of the French Union Forces in Viet-Nam. As the efficiency of the Vietnamese Armed Forces increases, the number of U.S. and French advisors and trainers will be decreased".<sup>2</sup>

The Quai d'Orsay accepted this revision<sup>3</sup> and informed the American Embassy on February 3 that General Ely was being instructed to proceed accordingly.<sup>4</sup>

After the issues had thus been resolved, Edgar Faure, the French Foreign Minister, formally replied under date of February 8, 1955, to Dulles' message to Mendès-France. Faure stated that

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 3195, Jan. 28, 1955, top secret.

\*Subsequently changed by agreement to read "overall authority".

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 2726, Feb. 1, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Paris, tel. 3240, Feb. 2, 1955, top secret.

<sup>4</sup>From Paris, tel. 3255, Feb. 3, 1955, top secret.

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he was pleased with United States assurances that the training program would be in conformity with the provisions of the Cease-Fire Agreement, that the number of United States military personnel present at the time of the cease-fire would not be exceeded, and that the introduction of instructors and advisers would be carried out "progressively and discreetly."<sup>1</sup>

After General Collins returned to Saigon, General Ely delivered the requisite letters to Diem and General Collins on February 11, 1955, and, on the same day, Generals Ely and Collins submitted to Diem the joint recommendation of the French and United States Governments relative to the organization and training of a Vietnamese Armed Force of 100,000 men.<sup>2</sup> It had taken three months of intensive effort to obtain French agreement for the United States to assume the responsibility for training the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

The next day, at a press conference, Diem announced that, effective immediately, the MAAG would assume the responsibility for training the Vietnamese Army. In making this announcement Diem stated that this was being done at his request. (He had formally made such request in a letter to Collins dated January 19, 1955.) He also stated that the question had been under study and discussion since before the Geneva settlement and pointed out that both American and French personnel would be employed in this undertaking.<sup>3</sup>

Agreement on the Size of the Vietnamese Military  
Establishment and on the Amount of American  
Financial Support

While Washington sought to obtain French approval for the United States to assume responsibility for training the Vietnamese Armed Forces, General Collins in Saigon conducted

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<sup>1</sup>Translation of letter from Faure to Dulles in tel. 3397 from Paris, Feb. 11, 1955, secret. Mendès-France had been overthrown on February 5, 1955, when he failed to obtain a vote of confidence on his North African policy.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 3343, Feb. 11, 1955, confidential. The English texts of the three documents are in this telegram.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 3414, Feb. 15, 1955, unclassified.

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conversations with the Vietnamese authorities, on the one hand, and with General Ely, regarding the number of the Vietnamese military personnel the United States would be prepared to train and support. Collins' original recommendation to Washington provided for the reduction of the Vietnamese Armed Forces from about 170,000 to approximately 84,000 military personnel, plus 4,400 civilians, by July 1, 1955. The mission of this force would be to maintain internal security and to provide a small "blocking force" in conjunction with the French Expeditionary Corps, pending the arrival of outside assistance, should the Viet Minh resume military operations.<sup>1</sup> Ely agreed very reluctantly to this recommendation and expressed doubt that a force of this reduced size would be adequate for the tasks at hand. The initial Vietnamese reaction to the proposed reduction was unfavorable.<sup>2</sup>

Following a discussion with the Vietnamese Defense Minister, Ho Thong Minh, on December 20, 1954, Collins reported that Minh continued to be strongly opposed to the proposed reduction on the ground that it would render the Army too small to deal effectively with the sects, and cause the bulk of the discharges to seek enlistment in the armed forces of the sects as an alternative to unemployment, thereby increasing the bargaining power of the sects. Minh also indicated that such a rapid reduction would have an adverse effect on the country and on the political situation. Collins informed Washington that he was prepared to negotiate an extension of the period of phased reduction of the Vietnamese forces beyond the target date of July 1, 1955.<sup>3</sup>

The Vietnamese General Staff was thinking in terms of a force of 150,000.<sup>4</sup> At a meeting with Collins on January 5,

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 1830, Nov. 15, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2024, Nov. 30, 1954, secret. Collins was perturbed when news stories appeared in Saigon regarding his proposals for the size of the Vietnamese forces and the United States training of same. (From Saigon, tel. 2267, Dec. 14, 1954, secret.)

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2453, Dec. 24, 1954, secret.

<sup>4</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2581, Jan. 5, 1955, top secret.

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1955, Minh presented his counter-proposal providing for a reduction by July 1, 1955, to 150,000, which strength would be maintained until December 31, 1955, to be followed by reduction to a level of approximately 88,000 by March 1956. Minh emphasized that, for political reasons, the Vietnamese Government felt it essential to be able to say that the Armed Forces were being maintained at 150,000 during 1955. Collins refused to accept this proposition.

After this meeting, Collins recommended to Washington that the phase-down period be extended so that, by December 31, 1955, the force would consist of 100,000 military personnel, including 10,000 trainees--single men--who would have been drafted about September 1, 1955, for a 16 weeks training period, after which they would remain on active duty for 20 months, thus making a compulsory service period of two years. Beginning on January 1, 1956, additional groups of 10,000 would be drafted every four months, with concurrent discharge of an equal number of men from the regular force. Collins explained that it would cost the United States less money to develop such a conscript force, since the men would be paid at a reduced rate, than to continue payment on the French system under which the Government supported the soldier's family.<sup>1</sup> General Ely, with whom Collins discussed this recommendation on January 8, 1955, indicated general agreement with the new force levels.<sup>2</sup>

In the days that followed, Collins continued his negotiations with Minh. On January 17, 1955, Collins told Diem that he was near agreement with Minh on force levels. In a separate conversation the same day, Collins likewise informed Ely of this development.<sup>3</sup> Two days later, Collins showed Ely the drafts of letters he had suggested that Diem and Minh send him regarding United States assistance and training of the armed forces, as well as the structure and force level of same. Collins explained that this seeming Vietnamese initiative would put the Vietnamese Government in a better light if the texts were to become public. Ely reiterated his agreement with this procedure and suggested a

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2676, Jan. 10, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2663, Jan. 10, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2811, Jan. 17, 1955, secret.

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few modifications in the draft of the Diem letter. After this conversation with Ely, Collins saw Diem and Minh, who agreed to the draft letters and the Ely modifications. Both Vietnamese officials insisted, however, that the period of conscript service be reduced from 24 to 18 months, which Collins accepted.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, Diem wrote Collins, on January 19, 1955, formally requesting the United States to furnish financial support to the Vietnamese Armed Forces, and to assume full responsibility for training said forces under the "overall authority of General Paul Ely as Commander in Chief, and with cooperation of French mission for military aid." Diem stated that he had authorized his Defense Minister to obtain Collin's concurrence in a program for the re-organization of the armed forces developed by the Ministry of National Defense. Minh's letter to Collins of the same date outlined a program for reducing the armed forces by stages until the force level reached 100,000 military personnel by December 31, 1955. Minh stated that, beginning on September 1, 1955, a national selective service program would be instituted with the induction of the first group of 10,000 trainees for 18 months' compulsory service, and that a like number would be drafted each four months thereafter. Minh also stated that the trainees would be paid 50 piasters a week for the first four months, after which they would receive 100 piasters per week. Collins acknowledged both letters in his reply to Diem on January 20, 1955. Collins stated that he was pleased to accept the program proposed by Minh as a basis "for final negotiations in determining financial and training support" to be given by the United States to this program.<sup>2</sup>

Pursuant to the suggestion from Collins, in which Ely concurred,<sup>3</sup> Diem issued a press statement on January 20, 1955, which gave the gist of the contents of this exchange of letters.

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2875, Jan. 21, 1955, secret

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2876, Jan. 21, 1955, secret. Washington had announced on December 31, 1954, that, effective January 1, 1955, it would furnish financial aid directly to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, for the purpose of strengthening their defense against the threat of Communist subversion and aggression, pursuant to section 121 of the Mutual Security Act of 1954. (Department of State Bulletin, Jan. 10, 1955, p. 51.)

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2876, Jan. 21, 1955, secret.

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In this statement, Diem indicated that he had discussed the question of United States assistance with General Ely "who is in full accord, provided that such assistance be given in accord with existing agreements",<sup>1</sup> meaning thereby the Geneva settlement.

While Collins was negotiating the question of force level in Saigon, Washington was preparing for a review of United States policies and operations in the Associated States. In this connection Collins suggested that he return to Washington for consultations.<sup>2</sup> President Eisenhower approved the suggestion and requested Collins to be in Washington prior to the National Security Council meeting scheduled for January 27, 1955.<sup>3</sup> Collins departed Saigon on January 21, 1955.<sup>4</sup>

Collins submitted a detailed report of his mission, dated January 20, 1955, for consideration by the National Security Council. He recommended that the United States continue to support military and non-military assistance programs in Vietnam, and estimated that the cost of these to the United States would amount to \$327.3 million in calendar year 1955 and \$196.6 million in calendar year 1956. He also outlined the composition of the Vietnamese Armed Forces in 1956, when it would be made up of 100,000 military personnel and 4,400 civilians. Collins concluded his report by stating:

"In view of the importance of Vietnam to all of Southeast Asia, I am convinced that the United States should expend the funds, material, and effort required to strengthen the country and help it retain its independence. I cannot guarantee that Vietnam will remain free, even with our aid. But I know that, without our aid, Vietnam will surely be lost to Communism. If the chances of success are difficult to calculate, the results of a withdrawal of American aid are only too certain, not only

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2877, Jan. 21, 1955, unclassified.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tels. 2455 and 2663, Dec. 25, 1954 and Jan. 10, 1955, both top secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2873, Jan. 13, 1955, top secret.

<sup>4</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2876, Jan. 21, 1955, secret.

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in Vietnam but throughout Southeast Asia. Such a withdrawal would hasten the rate of Communist advances in the Far East as a whole and could result in the loss of Southeast Asia to Communism. In my opinion, the chance of success is not only worth the gamble; we cannot afford to let free Vietnam go by default."<sup>1</sup>

The National Security Council, President Eisenhower presiding, discussed Collins' report on January 27, 1955, and "approved in principle the programs of military and non-military aid for South Vietnam, and the general order of magnitude of the costs thereof, subject to action by responsible departments and agencies to screen such programs in detail and to determine the availability of funds therefor in accordance with the normal budgetary process".<sup>2</sup>

Collins returned to Saigon on February 9, 1955.<sup>3</sup> Pursuant to instructions from the Department,<sup>4</sup> the requisite agreements governing economic assistance and United States financial assistance for the Vietnamese Armed Forces for the calendar year 1955 were concluded by exchanges of notes between the American Embassy in Saigon and the Vietnamese Government between February 21, 1955, and April 23, 1955.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Collins to Secretary of State, "Report on Vietnam for the National Security Council", Jan. 20, 1955, top secret. The report was reproduced and circulated within the Department under cover of a memorandum by W. K. Scott, Director, Executive Secretariat, Jan. 24, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>NSC Action 1316, Jan. 27, 1955, top secret. A copy of this action was sent to Saigon for information. (To Saigon, instruction A-88, Feb. 8, 1955, top secret.)

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 3328, Feb. 10, 1955, secret.

<sup>4</sup>To Saigon, tels. 3366, Feb. 9, 1955, secret, 3368, Feb. 9, 1955, limited official use, and 3400, Feb. 10, 1955, confidential.

<sup>5</sup>The economic assistance agreement consisted of the Embassy note of February 21, 1955, and Diem's reply of March 7, 1955; the financial assistance agreement consisted of the Embassy note of April 22, 1955, and Diem's reply of April 23, 1955. The texts of these notes are enclosed in despatch 304 from Saigon, Mar. 17, 1956, confidential.

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American Efforts To Stave Off Renewed French Attempts To Replace the Diem Government

The Question of a Collins-Ely Joint "Reevaluation" of Diem's Prospects. At the tripartite conversations in Paris on December 18, 1954, Dulles had accepted Mendès-France's proposal that Collins and Ely study the question of what needed to be done to improve the situation in South Vietnam and to make recommendations so that necessary decisions could be taken. As developments unfolded, it appeared that there was no meeting of minds as to what had been agreed upon at the Paris conversations. After returning to Washington, Dulles informed Collins and Dillon, on December 24, 1954, that, although a study by Collins and Ely of alternative leaders to Diem was among the points on which Dulles had agreed with Mendès-France, he had not agreed that Collins and Ely should establish a deadline for the replacement of Diem by another man. Dulles also stated that it had been agreed that Collins and Ely would report late in January on the overall situation.<sup>1</sup>

From Paris, on January 6, 1955, Ambassador Dillon reported that La Chambre, in a conversation, had expressed disappointment with the results of the conversations held on December 18. According to Dillon, La Chambre indicated that the French Government was still thinking in terms of an alternative to Diem. La Chambre stated that he was convinced that the only possible workable solution was that Bao Dai return immediately to Saigon to help solve the interminable conflicts between the sects and the Diem government, that a new government be organized with former Premier Tran Van Huu as Prime Minister and, possibly, former Premier Nguyen Van Tam as Minister of the Interior and that Diem might take part in such a government.<sup>2</sup>

On returning to Saigon, Ely raised with Collins, on January 8, 1955, the question of the proposed joint review. Ely indicated that agreement had been reached in the Paris conversations that two of them should review the situation as of January 15, report on the chances of success of the Diem Government, and recommend

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2585 (2324 to Paris), Dec. 24, 1954, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 2866, Jan. 6, 1955, secret.

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possible alternatives. Collins stated that, as he understood it, no date had been specified for such a reevaluation. Collins also told Ely that, until France accepted the memorandum of understanding of December 13, 1954, on training of the Vietnamese forces, and until a definite agreement had been negotiated on United States direct support of the Vietnamese Armed Forces, there was little sound basis for a reevaluation of the Vietnamese situation. Collins went on to say that he was willing to meet with Ely for reevaluation at any time, that he felt that Diem was beginning to make progress on their 7-point program,<sup>1</sup> and that the only conclusion that could be reached at that time was that he and Ely would have to continue to support Diem until there was a fair chance to learn the results of these programs.<sup>2</sup>

At a subsequent meeting with Collins, on January 14, 1955, Ely asked how they should go about carrying out their instructions to make a joint assessment of the situation. Collins reiterated that Diem was making progress on their 7-point program, except for the point calling for broadening of the government. He stated that then was not the time to consider a possible alternative to Diem, for the latter had not yet had full opportunity to put the program into effect. Collins also said that he believed that the assessment might be begun in the first week in February and be completed by February 10. Ely commented that he hoped that Diem could succeed, but, should that not turn out to be the case within the next few weeks, Ely felt that he and Collins would have no alternative but to accept the principle of suggesting the return of Bao Dai either to support Diem, or, if necessary, to deal with the question of his replacement.

Ely went on to say that "it is Bao Dai or nothing if Diem does not measure up." Collins stated that he was willing to consider this suggestion, but that he considered it inopportune to discuss this matter because, if their discussion leaked out, it would have the effect of weakening Diem's position vis-à-vis the sects. When Ely said that his suggestion was not intended to undermine Diem, and that he felt it might be a tragic mistake

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<sup>1</sup>See above, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2663, Jan. 10, 1955, top secret.

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to gamble everything on one single man, Collins replied that, after their February analysis, there would still be time to consider an alternative and to make recommendations within 24 hours.<sup>1</sup>

In Washington, meanwhile, the French Embassy informed the Department of State, on January 10, 1955, that Paris suggested that a tripartite Ministerial-level meeting for a review of the Indochina situation be held during the first week in February after the Collins-Ely joint recommendations had been submitted. A Department officer commented that, in his personal view, there was some question whether it would be feasible for Collins and Ely to make such a joint evaluation in the absence of United States-French agreement on the training of Vietnamese forces and on a security program in Vietnam.<sup>2</sup>

The French Embassy representative also informed the Department that Ely had returned to Saigon with instructions to continue efforts to broaden the base of the Diem Government and to work out an eventual formula for "changing" the Diem Government. In the latter respect, Bao Dai was to be associated with the change in some way, but his exact role was to be decided only after consultation between Ely and Collins. When informing the American Embassy in Saigon of this development, on January 13, the Department stated that the United States had made no commitment at Paris to replace Diem or to associate Bao Dai with any such change, except in the event that Diem's failure to make progress made an alternative desirable. The Department also stated that the United States intended to continue firm support for Diem and a government of national union around him.<sup>3</sup>

In a separate message to Collins on the same day, Dulles said that he did not accept the thesis that a deadline should be established by which, assuming that no spectacular progress had been made, Diem would be replaced by any of the candidates suggested by the French, including Bao Dai. Dulles also said

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 2772, Jan. 15, 1955, secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 2514 (2870 to Saigon), Jan. 13, 1955, secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2872, Jan. 13, 1955, secret.

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that, on the basis of Collins' reports, he believed that Diem was beginning to make steady, if undramatic, progress, and "in any event we do not see, nor have you reported, a preferable alternate", and he added, "therefore, you should not join with Ely in any joint recommendation in this respect."<sup>1</sup> Paris continued to maintain the view, however, that Collins and Ely had a mandate from the December 18 Paris conversations to study the question of eventual alternatives to Diem, should the latter fail, and to submit recommendations to their respective Governments for consideration at the next Indochina review.<sup>2</sup>

Washington was very much concerned with French insistence that an alternative to Diem be considered by Collins and Ely. In a letter, dated January 20, 1955, to Theodore C. Achilles, Deputy Chief of Mission in Paris, the Counselor of the Department, Douglas MacArthur II, wrote of this concern and stated that Washington was not willing to consider alternative solutions at that juncture. MacArthur wrote in part:

"At a time when Diem at long last appears to be moving ahead in the right direction and making some real progress, with corresponding indications of substantial popular support, it would be madness and folly to get involved in an academic exercise where we would have no alternative to put forward and would be unwilling to agree to any alternative which the French might put forward. If the French have an alternative, and with Ely to put it forward, they are at liberty to do so; but it would be slapped down insofar as we are concerned."

MacArthur asked Achilles to attempt to dissuade French officials from continuing to insist on a discussion of alternatives and added: "I repeat, we are concerned about French insistence because we do not know what is really eating them and what ulterior motives some of them may have in insisting on this exercise at this time when real progress appears to be in the making by Diem."

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 2873 (2520 to Paris), Jan. 13, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 2987, Jan. 14, 1955, secret; tel. 3034, Jan. 18, 1955, top secret.

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Achilles replied, on January 27, 1955, that it would be impossible to dissuade French officials from continuing to insist that any plan they might be concocting be given at least a hearing. He stated that the French officials' analysis of the situation did not permit them to accept the United States thesis that Diem's improvement had completely obviated the need for a change of some kind. Achilles said in part:

"As to what is really eating the French, I think it is a combination of factors whose relative importance is hard to evaluate. One is a sincere belief that Diem is personally incapable of doing the necessary job, has too many cards stacked against him, and does not represent even the best available solution. ... Another is the widespread opinion in Parliament and the press that the Diem formula was forced on the Government against its better judgment and accepted only in the general interests of Franco-American relations. Mendès wishes to be able to point to the fact that he has at least tried to get us to change. The extent to which less creditable motives, such as jealousy of U.S. influence in Vietnam, the desire to replace 'anti-French' Vietnamese by pro-French ones, or more sinister thinking along 'Sainteny' lines enters into the picture is hard to say."<sup>1</sup>

Two days later Achilles reported that French officials, including Mendès-France, persisted in their view that the Collins-Ely review should include the question of alternatives to supporting the Diem Government.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letter, MacArthur to Achilles, Jan. 20, 1955; letter Achilles to MacArthur, Jan. 27, 1955; both personal and secret, both attached to memorandum by MacArthur (C) to Young (FE) and Tyler (WE), Feb. 1, 1955, secret. A month earlier Ambassador Dillon had summarized French opinion regarding Diem as follows: "Unfortunately Diem is universally considered in France to be a failure who owes his position solely to U.S. support. French Government has clearly intimated in repeated statements to Assembly that Diem is American protégé whom they support in order to ensure continuing American aid to South Vietnam." (From Paris, tel. 2697, Dec. 26, 1954, top secret.)

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 3201, Jan. 29, 1955, secret.

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While Collins was in Washington, he called on the French Ambassador, Maurice Couve de Murville, on January 31, 1955. Collins stated that Diem's position had improved and that Diem had shown evidence of a capacity to govern. He also stated that Diem should be supported, that France and the United States should continue their cooperation, and that there was a fifty-fifty chance that Vietnam could be saved. Collins emphasized that it was probably too late for the French or the Americans, alone or together, to try to remove Diem, and that the attempt would be chaos. In answer to the French Ambassador's question about the Collins-Ely joint report, Collins stated that he and Ely could submit a report to their respective Governments at any time. He suggested, however, that it would not be very illuminating to make that effort in mid-February, for the various programs were just getting under way and were too new to be profitably evaluated.<sup>1</sup>

Upon returning to Saigon on February 9, 1955, Collins called on Ely to review developments. In reporting this conversation, Collins stated that Ely made no mention whatever of reevaluation of the situation or of the prospects of the Diem Government.<sup>2</sup> From all indications, Collins and Ely at no time submitted "joint recommendations" to their respective Governments as envisaged at the Paris conversations of December 18, 1954. At Ely's suggestion, however, Collins prepared a study of the situation, dated February 25, 1955, a week in advance of Secretary Dulles' scheduled visit to Saigon. This study came to the following conclusions:

"1. With French and American assistance the Diem Government has developed a sound and progressive program in the fields of military affairs, resettlement of refugees, agrarian reform, a Provisional National Assembly and fiscal affairs.

"2. No progress has been made in persuading Diem to broaden the base of his Government.

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<sup>1</sup>Memorandum by Young (FE:PSA) of conversation among Collins, Couve de Murville, and Tyler (WE), Jan. 31, 1955, secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 3328, Feb. 10, 1955, secret.

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"3. To replace Diem at any time between the present and July 1956<sup>1</sup> would seriously retard these essential programs, if not fatally obstruct them.

"4. The solution is not to replace Diem, but, while continuing to press him to broaden his Government, fully and faithfully to support him. At the same time he should be stimulated and encouraged to realize all phases of his program.

"5. Without such support, Vietnam is almost certain to be lost to Communism. If the above measures are fully adhered to, there is a fair chance of saving Vietnam."

The study was discussed with Ely, who indicated general agreement with the paper as a whole and specific, though unofficial, agreement with the conclusions. Ely stated that, since there was no pressure to finalize a joint report, the study could be completed at some later date. The study was shown to Dulles during his visit to Saigon.<sup>2</sup>

The Eisenhower-Bao Dai Exchange of Letters, February 19 and March 5, 1955. While in Washington, Collins had recommended that a letter from President Eisenhower to Bao Dai would be useful in outlining United States policy with respect to Vietnam and its support of the Diem Government. The Department felt that such a letter would be timely in view of the long period since the United States had had official contact with the Vietnamese Chief of State and of rumors that pressure was being brought to bear on Bao Dai to remove Diem.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, President Eisenhower sent a letter, dated February 19, 1955, in which he stated that he was gratified to learn from General Collins that Diem was making "distinct progress", and that Collins believed that there was a good chance that Vietnam could remain free if there was continued effective action on the Diem

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<sup>1</sup>I.e., the date set by the Geneva Conference for all-Vietnamese elections.

<sup>2</sup>Collins to Young, Mar. 10, 1955, top secret, enclosing draft study, Feb. 25, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>Memorandum by Robertson (FE) to The Secretary, Feb. 16, 1955, confidential.

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Government's programs. Eisenhower went on to say that Diem's programs of land reform and reorganization of the Armed Forces should, when fully carried out, further increase the stability and unity of the government. Eisenhower concluded with the statement that the United States Government intended to continue its support of Diem's Government.<sup>1</sup>

Pursuant to instructions,<sup>2</sup> Eisenhower's letter was delivered on March 1 to Bao Dai at Cannes by a member of the American Embassy in Paris. At the same time, the Embassy's emissary orally conveyed a message from Collins,<sup>3</sup> which had been approved by the Department,<sup>4</sup> to the effect that he (Collins) was concerned with the activities of the Binh Xuyen sect which were hampering Diem's efforts to consolidate his position. Collins suggested that Bao Dai revoke his decrees of the previous year by which he had vested control of the police and sureté in the Binh Xuyen and turn over these functions to the Diem Government.

While pleased to receive Eisenhower's letter, Bao Dai was not enthusiastic about Collins' suggestion, in part because he had doubts that Diem would be equal to the task. Bao Dai stated that he did not think that removing the police and sureté from Binh Xuyen control would really help the political situation. He acknowledged the importance of having a Prime Minister in whom the United States had full confidence and stated that, with this in view, he had given Diem full powers and freedom of action to choose means to achieve the basic objective of countering Viet Minh subversion and developing a strong Vietnam capable of resisting Viet Minh attraction. Bao Dai also indicated that he did not think that Diem was making a sufficient effort to reconcile the differences between various elements of Vietnamese

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<sup>1</sup>Text of letter, Eisenhower to Bao Dai, Feb. 19, 1955, in Department of State Bulletin, Mar. 14, 1955, p. 423.

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 2956 (3607 to Saigon), Feb. 21, 1955, confidential. This instruction contains the text of the letter and suggests that Bao Dai's views on developments in Vietnam be solicited.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 3564 (sent to Paris as Saigon's 976), Feb. 25, 1955, secret.

<sup>4</sup>To Paris, tel. 2995, Feb. 25, 1955, secret.

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Dulles told Diem that the United States Government had a great stake in him and Vietnam and that the United States had, through its efforts and aid and moral support, contributed to Diem's position of security in the country. Therefore, it was essential that Diem take those actions necessary to strengthen his Government. Dulles said that, since Diem was secure, he could afford to bring into his government men who might otherwise be his political opponents, and the Secretary indicated that, in time of national crisis, differing elements must work together.

Dulles also said that he hoped Diem would realize that what he did in Vietnam was important to the United States in the cause of freedom throughout the world, and he added that, if there were failure in Vietnam, United States prestige would be gravely affected. Dulles pointed out that the United States Congress and American public opinion had accepted the United States policy of support for Diem and Free Vietnam and that the policies of the Diem Government would largely determine the continuation of that support. Dulles also told Diem that the French Government was giving evidence of supporting him and was not seeking to replace him, and the Secretary explained that, whereas over the past few months the French had wanted to discuss what should be done if Diem failed, they had recently dropped the subject.

In reply to Dulles' statement regarding the necessity of bringing in highly qualified people into the Government, Diem talked about the need to restore security. He stressed the fact that the people of Vietnam needed a feeling of security and that the guarantee of such security was the most important task facing him and his Government. Diem also described the difficulties he was having in controlling the sects and indicated that he suspected that the sects were receiving some support from French elements in Vietnam. He then touched on the problem of resettlement of refugees from North Vietnam, and on French efforts to arrive at a *modus operandi* with Viet Minh by which, according to Diem, the French were trying to safeguard their economic and cultural interests in the North as a pretext for the establishment of a political relationship with Hanoi.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From Manila, tel. SECTO 50, Mar. 1, 1955, top secret.

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After leaving Saigon, Dulles wrote to President Eisenhower that he had been favorably impressed by Diem "who is much more of a personality than I had anticipated." Dulles continued:

"He is not without defects, but his merits seemed greater than I had thought. Collins and Ely have done a superb job. ... Great difficulties remain, but their magnitude is less than six months ago."<sup>1</sup>

On returning from his travels in Southeast Asia, Dulles made a radio and television address on March 8, 1955. With respect to the situation in Vietnam, he enumerated three "abnormal" problems facing the Government in Saigon in developing an efficient government of its own "in substitution for French rule": (1) absorption and resettlement of refugees from the North, (2) the parochial attitude of the sects, who were withholding allegiance from the central government, and (3) the threat of the Communists in North Vietnam as well as those who had remained in the South. Dulles described Diem as a "true patriot, dedicated to independence and the enjoyment by his people of political and religious freedoms", and stated that he was convinced that the Diem Government "deserves the support which the United States is giving to help to create an efficient, loyal military force and sounder economic conditions."<sup>2</sup>

Divergence of French and United States Policies  
Toward the Diem Government During the  
Insurrection of the Sects

Ultimatum of the Sects to Diem and Abandonment of Proposed  
Joint Franco-American Representations to Diem and the Sects,  
March 21-27, 1955. The simmering controversy between the Diem Government and the sects, who had their own armed forces, entered a new phase on March 21, 1955. Some of the sect leaders, representing elements of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen, had formed a coalition under the banner of the "United Front of Nationalist Forces" early in March. The coalition issued a

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<sup>1</sup>Text of letter, Dulles to Eisenhower, in tel. DULTE 18 from Manila, Mar. 1, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>Department of State Bulletin, Mar. 21, 1955, pp. 461-462.

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manifesto which called for a government of national union and denounced dictatorship.<sup>1</sup> The situation was complicated by the fact that the Binh Xuyen controlled the Saigon police, and Diem had plans to use the National Army to wrest control from the Binh Xuyen.<sup>2</sup>

The coalition presented an ultimatum to Diem on March 21, demanding a reorganization of the Government within five days--the composition of the new government to meet with the approval of the sects.<sup>3</sup> In effect, the dissident sect leaders were challenging Diem's efforts to consolidate his authority.

In a talk with Diem on March 22, Collins assured him that United States policy remained unchanged and advised Diem to stand firm. In this conversation, Diem indicated that, if the sects resorted to violence in Saigon, he would use the National Army to maintain order.<sup>4</sup> It soon became apparent that the leader of the Binh Xuyen, Le Van Vien, was Diem's principal antagonist.<sup>5</sup>

The French authorities in Paris wanted to avoid, at any cost, having the Diem-sect controversy develop into an armed conflict. On March 23, they urged a joint Franco-American approach to Bao Dai in order to provide time to negotiate a modus vivendi.<sup>6</sup> The following day, the French proposed that a joint Franco-American démarche be made in Saigon by Ely and Collins to Diem, on the one hand, and the sect leaders, on the other, urging a political settlement and a broadening of the

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 3754, Mar. 8, 1955, confidential.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tels. 3328, Feb. 10, 1955, secret; 3906, Mar. 15, 1955, secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4038, Mar. 22, 1955, official use only.

<sup>4</sup>From Saigon. tel. 4050, Mar. 23, 1955, secret.

<sup>5</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4078, Mar. 23, 1955, secret.

<sup>6</sup>From Paris, tel. 4074, Mar. 23, 1955, secret.

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Vietnamese Government. The French submitted to Washington for its consideration the text of joint instructions to Ely and Collins for use in such a joint approach.

Washington's initial reaction was largely negative. The Department informed the French Minister, Pierre Millet, on March 25, that it seemed hardly necessary to urge Diem to get in contact with the sects in view of the fact that he had repeatedly invited them to meet with him. The Department also stated that the tenor of the draft instructions to Collins and Ely implied an equality of status between the Government and the sects. In the Department's view, the sects were rebels motivated by selfish considerations and were acting against the legal Government. The Department felt that the emphasis should be on a strong joint French-United States warning to the sects, informing them that both countries opposed their threatened violent action. The Department stated that the French should inform the sects that the French Expeditionary Corps, at the request of the Diem Government, would prevent the movement of sect forces into Saigon.<sup>2</sup>

Collins, in a conversation with Ely on March 27 after the latter's return from Paris, raised the question of a joint démarche. Ely stated that, since neither of them had received instructions, discussion of this matter could be postponed until later. Collins reported that he had the impression that Ely was not eager to go ahead with the joint approach.<sup>3</sup> Apparently nothing came of this proposal, and, in any event, it was soon overtaken by the developments in Saigon.

United States Support of Diem's Resistance to the Binh Xuyen Sect, March 29-31, 1955. Diem was determined to take over the headquarters of the National Police and Sureté, which were in Binh Xuyen hands, and Collins advised against the use of force.<sup>4</sup> Fighting broke out during the night of March 29-30,

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 4107, Mar. 24, 1955, secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 3384 (4165 to Saigon), Mar. 25, 1955, secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4159, Mar. 28, 1955, secret.

<sup>4</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4194, Mar. 30, 1955, secret.

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United States Rejection of the French Proposal To Request Bao Dai's Intervention in the Crisis Between Diem and the Sects, April 2-5, 1955. The search for a solution to the crisis continued through April. Ely proposed to Collins, on April 2, that the United States and France agree to ask Bao Dai to arbitrate the crisis. Under Ely's proposal, Bao Dai was to ask Diem, the sect leaders, and other Vietnamese political figures to come to Paris for consultations and conferences in order to achieve a political solution. At the same time, Bao Dai was to proclaim a ten-day truce, beginning at the expiration of a three-day truce arranged locally by Ely and Collins. Ely stated to Collins that the United States and France should advise Bao Dai of solutions the two countries considered desirable. Collins recommended that Washington accept Ely's proposal in principle, subject to his working out details of consultations and specific United States-French solutions to be recommended to Bao Dai.<sup>1</sup>

Paris, which had already formally requested U.S.-French discussion of the crisis,<sup>2</sup> supported Ely's proposal and indicated that it was ready to act jointly with the United States in making the requisite démarche to Bao Dai.<sup>3</sup> Washington, however, saw little merit in Ely's proposal. Dulles informed the French Ambassador, on April 3, that the situation was very complicated and that, although it was difficult to know exactly what to do, he doubted that calling the Vietnamese together in Paris was a good solution. Dulles expressed the view that the Binh Xuyen challenge to Diem struck at the fundamental issue of the authority of any government in Vietnam. In Dulles' opinion, the Binh Xuyen should be treated differently from the other two sects (Cao Dai and Hoa Hao), for it was not a religious organization with some popular support. Dulles said that the French Government should allow Diem to reestablish his authority and not restrict his means of doing so, and he added that, if the French assured Diem of moral and logistic support, the challenge from the Binh Xuyen might evaporate or be contained. If, with French support, Diem's impaired authority should be somewhat

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4301, Apr. 2, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tels. 4285, 4286, Apr. 2, 1955, both secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Paris. tel. 4292, Apr. 3, 1955, top secret.

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improved, the United States would be prepared to exert pressure on Diem to strengthen his administration by bringing other elements into his Government. There was no need to go to Paris for this purpose, Dulles stated, for France and the United States, with their respective resources, could exert more influence in Saigon, once Diem's central authority was established.

Dulles pointed out that, if Diem's authority were successfully challenged and he were immobilized, then no government would be able to operate in Vietnam, and the whole structure might collapse. Dulles warned that United States assistance of some \$300 to \$400 million was involved, and the United States did not anticipate any results from a Paris meeting with Bao Dai which would justify continuing such large-scale expenditures. The propaganda effects would also be bad in Asia were Diem to be summoned to Paris by Bao Dai for a conclave, with gangster rebels and sect leaders defying him.<sup>1</sup>

Dulles explained Washington's lack of enthusiasm for Ely's proposal in greater detail in an instruction to Saigon, Paris, and London. He stated that to accept Ely's proposal "is to commit ourselves to unknown proposition and uncertain results." In place of Ely's proposal, Dulles stated that he would prefer a formula to resolve matters in Saigon, one which would not involve Diem's departure from Saigon, his meeting on an equal plane with rebel gangsters, or a key role for Bao Dai. Dulles added that it would seem more in keeping for the French to propose that Bao Dai summon the Binh Xuyen leader, Le Van Vien, to France to take away his police powers if Bao Dai's intervention were actually needed. Dulles wrote that, unless some understanding could be worked out with the French, they should know that the United States would be compelled to reconsider its policy of support for Vietnam, and he added that the United States could not envisage any person, aside from Diem, whose presence at the head of the Vietnamese Government could justify United States financial and other support on a scale large enough to give him even a reasonable chance of success. With

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 3507 (4308 to Saigon, 5053 to London), Apr. 3, 1955, secret.

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respect to a démarche to Bao Dai for a ten- or fifteen-day truce, as distinct from his calling a meeting in Paris, Dulles wrote that he wanted additional information before committing the United States to a truce. The American Embassies in Paris and Saigon were instructed to convey the United States position to the French authorities, and the American Embassy in London was instructed to explain Washington's views to Eden.<sup>1</sup>

The tenuous truce arranged between the sects and the Government after the fighting on March 29-30 was to expire on April 6. Paris was thus anxious to have a joint United States-French démarche made to Bao Dai on April 4, asking him to telegraph Diem and the sect leaders to prolong the truce for at least two weeks in order that the United States and France might have time to work out a common solution of the crisis.<sup>2</sup> Washington decided not to go along with such a request to Bao Dai. Instead, Washington instructed Collins to see Diem and recommend that he agree to an extension of the truce by 48 hours, allowing time for the French to consider the United States position and for the development of a coordinated United States-French position.<sup>3</sup>

The British Foreign Office agreed substantially with Washington's views and with the points made by Dulles to the

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 4309 (3506 to Paris, 5054 to London), Apr. 3, 1955, top secret. Dulles sent a personal message to Collins the following day in which he explained the reasoning behind the United States position and stated: "I thought we felt when I was in Saigon [March 1] that the decision to back Diem had gone to the point of no return and that either he had to succeed or else the whole business would be a failure." (To Saigon, tel. 4330, Apr. 4, 1955, secret.) For further background on United States thinking, see tel. 4331 to Saigon, Apr. 4, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tels. 4300, 4302, 4305, Apr. 4, 1955, all top secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Paris, tel. 3510 (4318 to Saigon, 5059 to London), Apr. 4, 1955, top secret. As a consequence of efforts by Collins and Ely in Saigon, and by Bao Dai from France, the truce was extended, first, to April 20 and, subsequently, to May 1.

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French Ambassador.<sup>1</sup> The French "preliminary views", communicated to Ambassador Dillon on April 5 by Armand Bérard in Prime Minister Faure's office, indicated that basic differences remained as to the correct policy to pursue in the crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Collins cautioned Washington that adopting a rigid position in support of Diem would not allow the United States any room for maneuver in the event that Diem resigned, were relieved by Bao Dai, or were otherwise forced out of the Government. Collins pointed out that Diem was "nearly running a one-man show with his two brothers Luyen and Nhu", and that no new man could be persuaded to enter the Government. Collins stated that, although he was sure the Vietnamese Army could drive the Binh Xuyen out of Saigon and take over the police headquarters, the latter might go underground. Collins, moreover, doubted that the Binh Xuyen could be separated from the other sects. Collins also reported that Ely had clearly indicated that the French Expeditionary Corps would not actively participate in any action against the Binh Xuyen or other sects.<sup>3</sup>

French Rejection of the United States Proposal To Employ Bao Dai's Influence in Removing the Vietnamese Police From Binh Xuyen Control, April 6-9, 1966. As a means of resolving the principal issue--control of the police--Collins and Ely recommended, on April 6, that the United States and French Governments "make a joint approach to Bao Dai to secure his agreement to back Diem fully, not only in dismissing [the police chief, Lai Van] Sang, but [also] in removing police entirely from Binh Xuyen control."<sup>4</sup> Washington concurred in this recommendation and instructed the American Embassy in Paris to obtain the French Government's agreement to such a joint undertaking.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From London, tel. 4396, Apr. 5, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 4328, Apr. 5, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4348, Apr. 5, 1955, top secret.

<sup>4</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4349, Apr. 6, 1955, top secret.

<sup>5</sup>To Paris, tel. 3560 (4366 to Saigon), Apr. 6, 1955, top secret.

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Paris objected, however, to this proposed course of action because of its limited terms of reference. As described by Ambassador Dillon, the French believed that such a démarche would be inadequate, for it addressed itself to only one detail of the basic problem, which was to achieve a "broadened Government of National Union which would have real support of majority if not all Vietnamese factions." The French also believed that Bao Dai would not agree to action limited to removal of the police from Binh Xuyen control, but that he might agree to take action if the joint approach were put in a larger context of broadening Diem's Government to give representation to all factions of Vietnamese political life.<sup>1</sup>

Washington had previously, on April 1, authorized the American Embassy in Paris to approach Bao Dai or his representative to explain United States policy of support for Diem and to request that Bao Dai use his influence in having the sects accept the authority of the Central Government and accede to a political settlement.<sup>2</sup> These instructions were confirmed a few days later.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, a member of the American Embassy had an interview, on April 8, with Nguyen De, Bao Dai's Chief of the Imperial Cabinet, and learned that Bao Dai, who had granted Diem "full powers" in June 1954, had lost confidence in Diem's ability to govern. De explained that Bao Dai felt that Diem should be replaced and that the United States and France should agree to the creation of a "Supreme Council" or "Council of Elders", representing all anti-Communist factions in Vietnam, to take over the executive role of governing the country. Such a governing body, in which Diem could represent the Catholic element, would function under Bao Dai's overall direction, and the latter's function would be that of "Supreme Arbitrator".<sup>4</sup> Washington apparently did not react immediately to this suggestion.

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 4376, Apr. 7, 1955, secret. See also tel. 4395 from Paris, Apr. 9, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 3498, Apr. 1, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Paris, tel. 3562, Apr. 7, 1955, top secret.

<sup>4</sup>From Paris, tels. 4383, 4396, Apr. 8 and 9, 1955, both top secret.

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Reactions to the Ely-Collins Recommendation To Replace the Diem Government, April 7-9, 1955. About the same time, Collins reported, on April 7, that Ely had come to the conclusion that Diem could no longer be saved and that, in the interest of Vietnam and the Free World, Diem had to be replaced.<sup>1</sup> In a personal letter to Dulles, Collins, who had previously expressed his doubts about Diem's capacity to govern,<sup>2</sup> strongly supported Ely's conclusions and said that Diem lacked the "personal qualities of leadership and the executive ability successfully to head a government." Collins stated that Tran Van Do, the Foreign Minister, or Dr. Phan Huy Quat, a former Defense Minister, could successfully head a successor government.<sup>3</sup>

Collins' two messages of April 7 were shown to Senator Mansfield, whose reactions were (1) that the United States should continue to support Diem, even though it might mean difficulty with the French, and (2) that dropping Diem would probably lead to chaos and disintegration in Vietnam and would have a bad effect on United States prestige in Asia.<sup>4</sup> Dulles

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4382, Apr. 7, 1955, top secret. French officials in Paris supported Ely's views. (From Paris, tel. 4395, Apr. 9, 1955, top secret.)

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4263, Mar. 31, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4399, Apr. 7, 1955, top secret. Collins' opinion of Diem at this period may be of interest. On April 9 Collins reported: "Diem's virtues as anti-French leader have been tarnished by his dependence on his brothers which has led to quite general feeling that a Ngo family dictatorship is in effect being established. Few nationalists outside his family and immediate entourage would lift a finger in Diem's defense." (From Saigon, tel. 4448, Apr. 9, 1955, top secret.) The following day he wrote: "The root of the trouble is not in any divergence of U.S. and French views with regard to Sect rebellion. Real reason that I feel it would be best to accede to replacement of Diem is that Diem himself ... simply cannot successfully rule this country alone with the advice of his brothers and a handful of other advisors who have no public standing of consequence." (From Saigon, tel. 4452, Apr. 10, 1955, top secret.)

<sup>4</sup>Memorandum by Young (PSA) of conversation with Senator Mansfield, Apr. 8, 1955, top secret.

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therefore replied to Collins, on April 9, that, whereas the United States had proceeded on the assumption that Diem should be backed against any who might challenge him, the French had supported him only on the assumption that the Binh Xuyen would also be supported as an autonomous authority, and that when that sect challenged Diem he would not be allowed to use force to assert his authority over it. Dulles emphasized that any central government must have control over the national police. He pointed out that, if the French view prevailed, it would gravely weaken United States influence for the future in Vietnam and elsewhere. If Diem were removed, Dulles continued, his downfall might be interpreted in Vietnam and Asia as an example of the United States paying lip service to a nationalist and then forsaking a true nationalist leader when "colonial interests" put enough pressure on the United States. Dulles also pointed out that there would be strong opposition in the Congress if Diem were replaced under existing circumstances and that Senator Mansfield "is adamantly opposed to abandonment of Diem under present circumstances." Dulles wondered whether there were not some intermediate solution by which Diem could assert his authority over the Binh Xuyen and at the same time broaden his government by bringing other elements into it.<sup>1</sup>

United States Examination and Rejection of French Proposals for Alternatives to the Diem Government, April 10-18, 1955. In reply to Dulles, Collins reiterated that Diem was too inflexible and had to be replaced. He also stated that the French should propose a successor, one who would have to be acceptable to the United States.<sup>2</sup> Washington therefore prepared to consider the question of the necessity of replacing Diem, and asked for Collins' views on timing and form of such action.<sup>3</sup>

After receiving this information,<sup>4</sup> the Department instructed the American Embassy in Paris to inquire of the Quai d'Orsay

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<sup>1</sup>To Saigon, tel. 4438, Apr. 9, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4452, Apr. 10, 1955, top secret. For Collins' recommendations on successive steps to be taken to replace Diem, see tel. 4448 from Saigon, Apr. 9, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>To Saigon, tel. 4466, Apr. 11, 1955, top secret.

<sup>4</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4487, Apr. 12, 1955, top secret.

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what the intentions of the French Government were with respect to Ely's conclusion that Diem should be replaced. The instruction stated that, "without prejudice to our present position", Washington wanted detailed and specific answers to the following questions:

"a. Who would succeed Diem with best prospects carry out governmental programs and strengthen Free Vietnam?

"b. When is it proposed that any change would take place?

"c. What action would be taken to ensure governmental control of National police now under Binh Xuyen?

"d. What procedure would be followed in any proposed change?

"e. How do French propose to ensure sects' support of a new government?

"f. What support could new government count on from French forces?"

The Department suggested that the French send a representative to Washington in order to discuss the matter effectively.<sup>1</sup>

The French Foreign Ministry replied that it would send the questions to Ely with the request that he submit a detailed plan for action after coordination with Collins. The suggestion that the French send a representative to Washington was not well recieved, on the grounds that such action would be unproductive until a plan was set by Ely and coordinated with Collins.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 3622 (4487 to Saigon), Apr. 12, 1955, top secret. On April 11, Dulles called in the French Ambassador to emphasize that any successor to Diem must be a genuine nationalist and not a French puppet, and said that it was essential that the United States and the French should cooperate fully. (Memorandum by Merchant (EUR) of conversation between Dulles and Couve de Murville, Apr. 11, 1955, secret; see also tel. 4514 to Saigon (3631 to Paris), Apr. 13, 1955, secret.)

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 4436, Apr. 13, 1955, top secret. On the same day, the French Ambassador delivered to the Counselor of the Department a message from his Government requesting that someone be sent from the Department to Paris for discussion on the Vietnam crisis. (Memorandum by Hoey (PSA) of conversation among Couve de Murville, MacArthur (C), and Tyler (WE), Apr. 13, 1955, secret.)

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When Collins reported, on April 14, that Ely proposed that the two of them submit joint recommendations and joint answers to the Department's questions to Paris,<sup>1</sup> the Department emphasized that what it wanted was a unilateral French evaluation of Ely's recommendations and not any joint recommendations.<sup>2</sup>

Although French officials disliked the idea of having to develop a unilateral proposal for the replacement of Diem,<sup>3</sup> the Quai d'Orsay finally, on April 17, submitted answers to Washington's six questions as follows:

"(1) The person designated to succeed Diem would have to be an indisputable nationalist, and not labelled as a man particularly favorable to France or the United States.

"(2) A decision ought to be reached urgently in view of the tense situation in Saigon.

"(3) Since the Binh Xuyen had already promised to place the police under a new government, the Chief of State would state precisely that the change of government ipso facto meant that the new government would name the chief of police.

"(4) As concerned procedure, the United States and France should agree on the formation of a new government, then approach Bao Dai secretly with the recommendation to obtain his agreement, after which Bao Dai could convoke a conference at Cannes of various political leaders to announce his program, which would include the creation of a Supreme Council and the setting of a date for elections.

"(5) the sects would support a new government by participating in the Supreme Council and in a government of national union.

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<sup>1</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4529, Apr. 14, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Saigon, tel. 4537 (3653 to Paris), Apr. 14, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Paris, tel. 4498, Apr. 16, 1955, top secret.

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"(6) Since Vietnam was independent, the French forces there would no longer be intended to reinforce any particular Vietnamese government."<sup>1</sup>

The Ambassador explained that the French felt it necessary to turn to Bao Dai to effect a change in the government in Saigon because there was no electoral body in Vietnam. Dulles asked why an electoral body could not be set up, and stated that the spectacle of the French, with or without the United States participating, "suddenly yanking Diem out of office and going through the motions of having him replaced by Bao Dai at Cannes would be unedifying." The Ambassador summarized the conversation by saying that the problems requiring solution were (1) the need to make a change and (2) the choices if a change were to be made. Dulles agreed and said that, in any change, Diem's strength should be retained as an asset for the Government of Vietnam and not as a force against it.<sup>2</sup>

Short-lived Diem Proposal To Form an "Interim Government" Pending Election of a Constituent Assembly, April 13-19, 1955. While Paris and Washington were endeavoring to reach agreement on a common policy, the political pot continued to boil in Saigon. Collins reported, on April 13, that Diem was considering formation of an "interim government" to hold office pending general elections for a constituent assembly to be held possibly in two months.<sup>3</sup> Dulles seized upon the idea and instructed Collins to explore this possibility, saying that a "locally selected successor government would be infinitely preferable to one hand-picked by France and U.S. and rubberstamped by Bao Dai."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Translation of French aide-mémoire in tel. 4503, from Paris, Apr. 17, 1955, top secret; French text of aide-mémoire enclosed in desp. 2216 from Paris, Apr. 18, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 3697 (4603 to Saigon), Apr. 18, 1955, top secret. The American Embassy in London was instructed to inform the British Foreign Office of this conversation. (To London, tel. 5376, Apr. 20, 1955, top secret.)

<sup>3</sup>From Saigon, tel. 4502, Apr. 13, 1955, top secret.

<sup>4</sup>To Saigon, tel. 4516, Apr. 13, 1955, top secret.

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thereby replacing Diem, and (2) a Council of National Union, made up of various political factions, the sects, and other groups in the Vietnamese body politic except the Communists. The Council was to serve until a National Assembly had been established. Before proceeding with this plan, Bao Dai indicated that he wanted the backing of the United States and France.<sup>1</sup>

The Department's initial reaction to Bao Dai's proposal was that, because the whole Vietnam problem was being reviewed in consultation with Collins, it was not in a position to comment.<sup>2</sup> When Bao Dai's representative informed the Embassy in Paris that Bao Dai felt he could no longer delay putting the plan into effect and that he would act on April 27,<sup>3</sup> The Department replied, on April 25, that it hoped that Bao Dai would take no action, pending Collins' return to Saigon, and added that, if Bao Dai were to take precipitate action, the United States "would have to review its position as to its continuing support of Vietnam."<sup>4</sup> Bao Dai's rejoinder, on April 26, was that he had to act in order to avoid disaster.<sup>5</sup> The following day, however, he agreed to delay action, on the understanding that Washington's views on his plan would soon be forthcoming.<sup>6</sup> The Department continued to emphasize its hope that Bao Dai would refrain from any irrevocable action until Collins returned to Saigon and reviewed the situation with Ely.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. 4576, Apr. 21, 1955, top secret. The American Embassy in Saigon thought that Bao Dai's plan was French-inspired. (From Saigon, tel. 4780, Apr. 24, 1955, top secret.)

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, tel. 3772, Apr. 22, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>From Paris, tel. 4641, Apr. 25, 1955, secret.

<sup>4</sup>To Paris, tel. 3803, Apr. 25, 1955, secret.

<sup>5</sup>From Paris, tel. 4659, Apr. 26, 1955.

<sup>6</sup>From Paris, tel. 4671, Apr. 27, 1955, secret.

<sup>7</sup>To Paris, tels. 3830, Apr. 27, 1955, top secret; 3850, Apr. 28, 1955, confidential. For reports by an officer of the American Embassy in Paris of interviews with Bao Dai on April 28

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Temporary United States Agreement With the French on the Need To Replace Diem, April 22-30, 1955. Collins arrived in Washington on April 22 and made an informal report on the Vietnamese situation to President Eisenhower.<sup>1</sup> Following full consultations which Collins had with Department officials and Congressional leaders running over a number of days, Washington concluded that some change in the political arrangements in Vietnam was inevitable. Washington was prepared to consider Diem's being replaced and sought unequivocal French assurances for full backing of any new political arrangement in Saigon, as well as clarification of French policy toward North Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> What Washington wanted, in essence, was French concurrence that a new government would control the police and have the allegiance of the sects and the support of Bao Dai. Washington also wanted Collins, on returning to Saigon, to review the situation with Ely.

Dulles, with Collins present, made these points to the French Ambassador on April 28, and Ambassador Dillon in Paris was instructed to take the matter up with the French Prime Minister. Dillon was directed to state that the crisis in Vietnam had forced the United States to review its basic policy, resulting in the conclusion that no government in Vietnam would succeed, even with full United States support,

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and 29, at the latter of which Bao Dai asked that the United States urge Diem to go to Cannes for consultations, see tels. 4743 and 4746 from Paris, Apr. 30, 1955, both top secret. The United States did not accede to this request. (To Paris, tel. 3888, Apr. 30, 1955, top secret.)

<sup>1</sup>Memorandum by Hoover (U) for the Secretary, Apr. 23, 1955, confidential.

<sup>2</sup>To Paris, 3828 (4756 to Saigon), Apr. 27, 1955, top secret. United States views on procedures for creating a new government structure in Saigon, including the appointment of a new Prime Minister by Bao Dai, which were to be presented to the French, are contained in tel. 3829 to Paris (4757 to Saigon), Apr. 27, 1955, top secret. This instruction was cancelled five hours after it was dispatched, possibly because of developments in Saigon. (To Paris, tel. 3837 (4766 to Saigon), Apr. 27, 1955, secret.)

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unless it enjoyed Nationalist Vietnamese support, unambiguous French support, and full support by Bao Dai. Dillon was also to say that, to obtain United States support, any future government in Vietnam, whether or not it included Diem, had to be clearly assured of:

"1. The full and unqualified support of France, thereby dispelling any ambiguity with respect to North Viet-Nam.

"2. Bao Dai must ensure that the legal government has full authority, including control of the police and the military forces of Viet-Nam.

"3. Bao Dai and the French must wholeheartedly assist by every means available to them in integrating the sects into the normal life of Viet-Nam, in relieving them of their feudal powers and territorial control and integrating their private armies into the national army."<sup>1</sup>

Dillon made his representations to Prime Minister Faure on April 29, against the background of fighting in Saigon. Faure said that he was in full accord with the principles enunciated by the United States, that the sole preoccupation of the French Government was to preserve Vietnam for the Free World, and that the belated favorable response by the United States to earlier French representations might prove to have been too late in view of events in Saigon. Faure also stated that the French Government had no intention of getting into any quarrel with the United States over South Vietnam and that the French would not act independently of the United States unless the situation there developed to the point of forcing evacuation of the area.<sup>2</sup> The formal French reply to Dillon's representation, contained in an aide-mémoire of April 30, indicated that, although the French agreed with the principles for a solution of the governmental problem in Vietnam as enunciated by the United States, they regretted that agreement on how to proceed had not been reached previously. The aide-mémoire stated, in part, that, because the United States had

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. 3849, Apr. 28, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. 4740, Apr. 29, 1955, top secret.

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The conversations dealing with Vietnam, beginning with the first Ministerial meeting on the evening of May 7, were long, drawn out, brutally frank, and sometimes acrimonious. The principal point at issue was the by then perennial question of support or abandonment of Diem.

Premier Faure, who headed the French delegation, expressed France's continued disillusionment with Diem without, however, being able to come up with a satisfactory alternative. Faure therefore proposed, by way of solution, that, if the United States were disposed to help protect French civilians and interests in South Vietnam and the refugees from North Vietnam who had migrated to the South, France might withdraw all of its military forces from Vietnam. By this move, France would obviate the cause for any further South Vietnamese charges of French "colonialism" and respond to Diem's demand that the French quit Indochina altogether.

In an effort to be conciliatory, Dulles suggested that the common interests of the United States and France were too great to be jeopardized by a difference of opinion on Vietnam. He therefore made a counter-proposal that, if it would solve the problem, the United States would withdraw from and drop its support of South Vietnam. He added that Franco-American differences had to be resolved, for, without such a reconciliation, the United States Congress would probably discontinue the aid program. Dulles explained that the choice for the United States was to support Diem or withdraw. In this connection, he assured Premier Faure that the proposal he had made would be weighed carefully.<sup>1</sup>

Dulles then fired Faure's proposed solution back to Washington and Embassy Saigon for comment.<sup>2</sup> In his message to President Eisenhower, the Secretary conveyed his guess that the French were not bluffing and that Faure's proposal to withdraw the French Expeditionary Corps "may be the agreed solution."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. SECTO 8, May 8, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tels. DULTE 8 and 9 (the latter sent to Saigon as Paris tel. 717), May 8, 1955, top secret.

<sup>3</sup>Letter, Dulles to Eisenhower, May 7, 1955, sent as tel. DULTE 2 from Paris, May 7, 1955, top secret.

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The President replied that the United States could not afford to have forces committed in "such undesirable areas" as Vietnam. The Department of Defense informed Dulles that the United States could not guarantee the security of French nationals should the French Expeditionary Corps be withdrawn and recommended, as an immediate joint objective, "the utmost in cooperation and energetic action by the Vietnamese, United States, and French Governments toward the restoration of internal order and governmental control in Vietnam." The Department of State gave its opinion that withdrawal or reduction of the French Expeditionary Corps would not be "without positive political value in Viet-Nam and possibly to France although we recognize such might diminish whatever deterrent value FEC presence against Communist aggression constitutes." The Department also stated that, from the political point of view, it would be advantageous to France and the Free World if the French were to negotiate with Diem regarding at least a limited withdrawal of the FEC. Such negotiations might result in France's retention of certain limited FEC functions, such as patrolling the demarcation line, occupation of Tourane and perhaps other bases, and participation in the training of the Vietnamese Army, rather than having France face a Vietnamese request for complete withdrawal. Collins reported from Saigon that there were significant military as well as economic reasons for the retention of the French Expeditionary Corps and that, from the political standpoint, the presence of French forces exerted a desired moderating influence on developments in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>

Armed with these somewhat conflicting views from Washington and Saigon, Dulles endeavored to work out some sort of compromise solution. At the second tripartite Ministerial meeting on May 10, the Secretary declared that, if the French were to withdraw their forces, the United States would use such influence as it had with any Vietnamese government to protect French lives and property. Dulles then asked whether, in return, the French might not bring themselves to support Diem with a strengthened government pending the development of electoral procedures to establish a new government which might or might not include Diem.

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<sup>1</sup>To Paris, tel. TEDUL 2, May 8, 1955, top secret; to Paris, tel. TEDUL 9, May 9, 1955, top secret; to Paris, tel. TOSEC 10, May 9, 1955, top secret; and from Saigon, tel. 5154 (sent to Paris as Saigon tel. 1323), May 9, 1955, top secret.

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Premier Faure agreed, provided that the "strengthened government" were one of national union which would include the sects and that the Diem government cease its anti-French propaganda. Dulles cautioned that the United States could not dictate to Diem, who had a mind and will of his own and was not in the United States' pocket, and it might be impossible to force Diem to take into his government men who opposed him.<sup>1</sup>

At their meeting on Wednesday, May 11, Premier Faure and Secretary Dulles got down to brass tacks--i.e., what was to be committed to paper. The French proposed that a short paper be drafted on the points of agreement in order that instructions to the United States and French representatives in Saigon might be in harmony. Dulles preferred that each country draw up its own instructions, which would then be shown to the other for comment before being put into final form. This procedure was adopted.<sup>2</sup>

Dulles' instruction to Saigon, addressed to the new Ambassador, G. Frederick Reinhardt (who, at the time, was in Washington), emphasized support for the Diem Government as an "independent and sovereign government" which the United States wanted to see strengthened. In pursuit of this objective, the Ambassador was to "maintain contact" with his French and British colleagues. The instructions stated that (1) the lawful government should exercise "unquestioned authority" over the National Army and the National Police, (2) the Binh Xuyen should be disbanded, (3) the other sects should be amalgamated into the normal life of Vietnam, and (4) the development of electoral machinery and representative processes should be encouraged. The instructions directed the Ambassador to exert himself to bring about a cessation of anti-French propaganda on the part of the Vietnamese Government and stated that the United States believed that nationwide free elections, pursuant to the Geneva settlement, should be held in July 1956. The instructions went on to say that the French Expeditionary Corps would be progressively reduced, consistent with the increased capability of the Vietnamese Armed Forces, and that a pause in the reduction would come when some minimum level had been reached. The instructions also stated

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. SECTO 36, May 11, 1955, top secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. SECTO 42, May 12, 1955, secret.

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that the United States believed that freedom could be saved in Vietnam if violent revolutionary forces were brought under control and that Diem should be in a position, with support from the French and the United States, to adopt moderate and constructive policies in developing a national government.<sup>1</sup>

The French instructions of May 14 to Ely were similar, in the main, to the United States instructions. The principal differences were that (1) the French put great stress on broadening the political base of the Diem Government in order to settle more easily the problem of the sects, and (2) the instructions asked for Ely's suggestions as to what action might be taken by the three powers (U.S., U.K., and France) to insure the legal status quo of Bao Dai and, if the need arose, to utilize his influence to assist the Diem Government's pacification efforts.<sup>2</sup>

The Paris conversations marked, in effect, the end of the policy of joint action by the United States and France in Vietnam. The United States emphasis on parallel but unilateral action allowed Washington considerable leeway to pursue an independent course and, at the same time, to maintain the possibility of cooperation with France when desirable or necessary. Although only dimly envisaged at the time, the decisions taken at Paris paved the way for the United States to shoulder a greater share of responsibility for the defense of South Vietnam as French power in the area receded, but without the authority which grounded forces in being, such as the French Expeditionary Corps, represented.

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<sup>1</sup>From Paris, tel. SECTO 46 (sent to Saigon as Paris' POLTO 33), May 13, 1955, secret.

<sup>2</sup>From Paris, tel. SECTO 42, May 12, 1955, secret.

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